DODO·

A·DETAIL·OF·THE·DAY·

E·F·BENSON·

2 vols

DODO

And far out, drifting helplessly on that grey, angry sea, I saw a small boat at the mercy of the winds and waves. And my guide said to me, 'Some call the sea "Falsehood," and that boat "Truth," and others call the sea "Truth," and the boat "Falsehood;" and, for my part, I think that one is right as the other.'—*The Professor of Ignorance.*

DODO

A DETAIL OF THE DAY

BY

E. F. BENSON

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

Methuen and Co.
18 BURY STREET, W.C.
LONDON
1893

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/dododetailofday00bens

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I., ... 1

CHAPTER II., ... 23

CHAPTER III., ... 42

CHAPTER IV., ... 60

CHAPTER V., ... 96

CHAPTER VI., ... 121

CHAPTER VII., ... 135

CHAPTER VIII., ... 155

CHAPTER IX., ... 170

CHAPTER X., ... 190

DODO

DODO.

CHAPTER I.

POETS of all ages and of all denominations are unanimous in assuring us that there was once a period on this grey earth known as the Golden Age. These irresponsible bards describe it in terms of the vaguest, most poetic splendour, and, apart from the fact, upon which they are all agreed, that the weather was always perfectly charming, we have to reconstruct its characteristics in the main for ourselves. Perhaps if the weather was uniformly delightful, even in this nineteenth century, the golden age might return again. We all know how perceptibly our physical, mental and spiritual level is raised by a few days of really charming weather; but until the

weather determines to be always golden, we can hardly expect it of the age. Yet even now, even in England, and even in London, we have every year a few days which must surely be waifs and strays from the golden age, days which have fluttered down from under the hands of the recording angel, as he tied up his reports, and, after floating about for years in dim, interplanetary space, sometimes drop down upon us. They may last a week, they have been known to last a fortnight; again, they may curtail themselves into a few hours, but they are never wholly absent.

At the time at which this story opens, London was having its annual golden days; days to be associated with cool, early rides in the crumbly Row, with sitting on small, green chairs beneath the trees at the corner of the Park; with a general disinclination to exert oneself, or to stop smoking cigarettes; with a temper distinctly above its normal level, and a corresponding absence of moods. The crudeness of spring had disappeared, but not its freshness; the warmth of summer had come, but not its sultriness; the winter was definitely over and past, and even in Hyde Park the voice of the singing bird was heard, and an old gentle-

man, who shall be nameless, had committed his annual perjury by asserting in the *Morning Post* that he had heard a nightingale in the elm-trees by the Ladies' Mile, which was manifestly impossible.

The sky was blue; the trees, strange to say, were green, for the leaves were out, and even the powers of soot which hover round London had not yet had time to shed their blackening dew upon them. The season was in full swing, but nobody was tired of it yet, and 'all London' evinced a tendency to modified rural habits, which expressed themselves in the way of driving down to Hurlingham, and giving water parties at Richmond.

To state this more shortly, it was a balmy, breezy day towards the middle of June. The shady walks that line the side of the Row were full of the usual crowds of leisurely, well-dressed people who constitute what is known as London. Anyone acquainted with that august and splendid body would have seen at once that something had happened; not a famine in China, nor a railway accident, nor a revolution, nor a war, but emphatically 'something.' Conversation was a thing that made time pass, not a way of passing the time. Obviously the larger half of

London was asking questions, and the smaller half was enjoying its superiority, in being able to give answers. These indications are as clear to the practised eye as the signs of the weather appear to be to the prophet Zadkiel. To the amateur one cloud looks much like another cloud; the prophet, on the other hand, lays a professional finger on one and says 'Thunder,' while the lurid bastion, which seems fraught with fire and tempest to the amateur, is dismissed with the wave of a contemptuous hand.

A tall, young man was slowly making his way across the road from the arch. He was a fair specimen of 'the exhausted seedlings of our effete aristocracy' — long-limbed, clean-shaven, about six feet two high, and altogether very pleasant to look upon. He wore an air of extreme leisure and freedom from the smallest touch of care or anxiety, and it was quite clear that such was his normal atmosphere. He waited with serene patience for a large number of well-appointed carriages to go past, and then found himself blocked by another stream going in the opposite direction. However, all things come to an end, even the impossibility of crossing from the

arch at the entrance of the Park to the trees on a fine morning in June, and on this particular morning I have to record no exception to the rule. A horse bolting on to the Row narrowly missed knocking him down, and he looked up with mild reproach at its rider, as he disappeared in a shower of dust and soft earth.

This young gentleman, who has been making his slow and somewhat graceful entrance on to our stage, was emphatically 'London,' and he too saw at once that something had happened. He looked about for an acquaintance, and then dropped in a leisurely manner into a chair by his side.

'Morning, Bertie,' he remarked; 'what's up?'

Bertie was not going to be hurried. He finished lighting a cigarette, and adjusted the tip neatly with his fingers.

'She's going to be married,' he remarked.

Jack Broxton turned half round to him with a quicker movement than he had hitherto shown.

'Not Dodo?' he said.

'Yes.'

Jack gave a low whistle.

'It isn't to you, I suppose?'

Bertie Arbuthnot leaned back in his chair with extreme languor. His enemies, who, to do him justice, were very few, said that if he hadn't been the tallest man in London, he would never have been there at all.

'No, it isn't to me.'

'Is she here?' said Jack, looking round.

'No, I think not; at least I haven't seen her.'

'Well, I'm—' Jack did not finish the sentence. Then as an after-thought he inquired: 'Whom to?'

'Chesterford,' returned the other.

Jack made a neat little hole with the ferrule of his stick in the gravel in front of him, and performed a small burial service for the end of his cigarette. The action was slightly allegorical.

'He's my first cousin,' he said. 'However, I may be excused for not feeling distinctly sympathetic with my first cousin. Must I congratulate him?'

'That's as you like,' said the other. 'I really don't see why you shouldn't. But it is rather overwhelming, isn't it? You know Dodo is awfully charming, but she hasn't got any of the domestic virtues. Besides, she ought to be an empress,' he added loyally.

'I suppose a marchioness is something,' said Jack.

'But I didn't expect it one little bit. Of course he is hopelessly in love. And so Dodo has decided to make him happy.'

'It seems so,' said Bertie, with a fine determination not to draw inferences.

'Ah, but don't you see—' said Jack.

'Oh, it's all right,' said Bertie. 'He is devoted to her, and she is clever and stimulating. Personally I shouldn't like a stimulating wife. I don't like stimulating people, I don't think they wear well. It would be like sipping brandy all day. Fancy having brandy at five o'clock tea. What a prospect, you know. Dodo's too smart for my taste.'

'She never bores one,' said Jack.

'No, but she makes me feel as if I was sitting under a flaming gas-burner, which was beating on to what Nature designed to be my brain-cover.'

'Nonsense,' said Jack. 'You don't know her. There she is. Ah!'

A dog-cart had stopped close by them, and a girl got out, leaving a particularly diminutive groom at the pony's head. If anything she was a shade more perfectly dressed than the rest of the crowd, and she seemed to know it. Behind her walked another girl,

who was obviously intended to walk behind, while Dodo was equally obviously made to walk in front.

Just then Dodo turned round and said over her shoulder to her,—

'Maud, tell the boy he needn't wait. You needn't either unless you like.'

Maud turned round and went dutifully back to the dog-cart, where she stood irresolutely a few moments after giving her message.

Dodo caught sight of the two young men on the chairs, and advanced to them. The radiant vision was evidently not gifted with that dubious quality, shyness.

'Why, Jack,' she exclaimed in a loudish voice, 'here I am, you see, and I have come to be congratulated! What are you and Bertie sitting here for like two Patiences on monuments? Really, Jack, you would make a good Patience on a monument. Was Patience a man? I never saw him yet. I would come and sketch you if you stood still enough. What are you so glum about? You look as if you were going to be executed. I ought to look like that much more than you. Jack, I'm going to be a married woman, and stop at home, and mend the

socks, and look after the baby, and warm Chesterford's slippers for him. Where's Chesterford? Have you seen him? Oh, I told Maud to go away. Maud,' she called, 'come back and take Bertie for a stroll: I want to talk to Jack. Go on, Bertie; you can come back in half an hour, and if I haven't finished talking then, you can go away again—or go for a drive, if you like, with Maud round the Park. Take care of that pony, though; he's got the devil of a temper.'

'I suppose I may congratulate you first?' asked Bertie.

'That's so dear of you,' said Dodo graciously, as if she was used to saying it. Good-bye; Maud's waiting, and the pony will kick himself to bits if he stands much longer. Thanks for your congratulations. Good-bye.'

Bertie moved off, and Dodo sat down next Jack.

'Now, Jack, we're going to have a talk. In the first place you haven't congratulated me. Never mind, we'll take that as done. Now tell me what you think of it. I don't quite know why I ask you, but we are old friends.'

'I'm surprised,' said he candidly; 'I think it's very odd.'

Dodo frowned.

'John Broxton,' she said solemnly, 'don't be nasty. Don't you think I'm a very charming girl, and don't you think he's a very charming boy?'

Jack was silent for a minute or two, then he said,—

'What is the use of this, Dodo? What do you want me to say?'

'I want you to say what you think. Jack, old boy, I'm very fond of you, though I couldn't marry you. Oh, you must see that. We shouldn't have suited. We neither of us will consent to play second fiddle, you know. Then, of course, there's the question of money. I must have lots of money. Yes, a big must *and* a big lot. It's not your fault that you haven't got any, and it wouldn't have been your fault if you'd been born with no nose; but I couldn't marry a man who was without either.'

'After all, Dodo,' said he, 'you only say what every one else thinks about that. I don't blame you for it. About the other, you're wrong. I am sure I should not have been an exacting husband. You could have had your own way pretty well.'

'Oh, Jack, indeed no,' said she;—'we are wandering

from the point, but I'll come back to it presently. My husband must be so devoted to me that anything I do will seem good and charming. You don't answer that requirement, as I've told you before. If I can't get that—I have got it, by the way—I must have a man who doesn't care what I do. You would have cared, you know it. You told me once I was in dreadfully bad form. Of course that clinched the matter. To my husband I must never be in bad form. If others did what I do, it might be bad form, but with me, no. Bad form is one of those qualities which my husband must think impossible for me, simply because I am I. Oh, Jack, you must see that —don't be stupid! And then you aren't rich enough. It's all very well to call it a worldly view, but it is a perfectly true one for me. Don't you see I must have everything I want. It is what I live on, all this,' she said, spreading her hands out. 'All these people must know who I am, and that they should do that, I must have everything at my command. Oh, it's all very well to talk of love in a cottage, but just wait till the chimney begins to smoke.'

Dodo nodded her head with an air of profound wisdom.

'It isn't for you that I'm anxious,' said Jack, 'it's for Chesterford. He's an awfully good fellow. It is a trifle original to sing the husband's praise to the wife, but I do want you to know that. And he isn't one of those people who don't feel things because they don't show it—it is just the other way. The feeling is so deep that he can't. You know you like to turn yourself inside out for your friend's benefit, but he doesn't do that. And he is in love with you.'

'Yes, I know,' she said, 'but you do me an injustice. I shall be very good to him. I can't pretend that I am what is known as being in love with him—in fact I don't think I know what that means, except that people get in a very ridiculous state, and write sonnets to their mistress's front teeth, which reminds me that I'm going to the dentist to-morrow. Come and hold my hand—yes, and keep withered flowers and that sort of thing. Ah, Jack, I wish that I really knew what it did mean. It can't be all nonsense, because Chesterford's like that, and he is an honest man if you like. And I do respect and admire him very much, and I hope I shall make him happy, and I hear he's got a delightful new yacht; and, oh! do look at that Arbuthnot girl opposite with a magenta

hat. It seems to me inconceivably stupid to have a magenta hat. Really she is a fool. She wants to attract attention, but she attracts the wrong sort. Now *she* is in bad form. Bertie doesn't look after his relations enough.'

'Oh, bother the Arbuthnot girl,' said Jack angrily, 'I want to have this out with you. Don't you see that that sort of thing won't do with Chesterford. He is not a fool by any means, and he knows the difference between the two things.'

'Indeed he doesn't,' said Dodo. 'The other day he was talking to me, and I simply kept on smiling when I was thinking of something quite different, and he thought I was adorably sympathetic. And, besides, I am not a fool either. He is far too happy for me to believe that he is not satisfied.'

'Well, but you'll have to keep it up,' said Jack. 'Don't you see I'm not objecting to your theory of marriage in itself—though I think it's disgusting—but it strikes me that you have got the wrong sort of man to experiment upon. It might do very well if he was like you.'

'Jack, you sha'n't lecture me,' said Dodo; 'I shall do precisely as I like. Have you ever known me

make a fool of myself? Of course you haven't. Well, if I was going to make a mess of this, it would be contrary to all you or anyone else knows of me. I'm sorry I asked your opinion at all. I didn't think you would be so stupid.'

'You told me to tell you what I thought,' said Jack in self-defence. 'I offered to say what you wanted, or to congratulate or condole or anything else; it's your own fault, and I wish I'd said it was charming and delightful, and just what I'd always hoped.'

Dodo laughed.

'I like to see you cross, Jack,' she remarked, 'and now we'll be friends again. Remember what you have said to-day—we shall see in time who is right, you or I. If you like to bet about it you may—only you would lose. I promise to tell you if you turn out to be right, even if you don't see it, which you must if it happens, which it won't, so you won't,' she added with a fine disregard of grammar.

Jack was silent.

'Jack, you are horrible,' said Dodo impatiently, 'you don't believe in me one bit. I believe you are jealous of Chesterford; you needn't be.'

Then he interrupted her quickly.

'Ah, Dodo, take care what you say. When you say I needn't be, it implies that you are not going to do your share. I want to be jealous of Chesterford, and I am sorry I am not. If I thought you loved him, or would ever get to love him, I should be jealous. I wish to goodness I was. Really, if you come to think of it, I am very generous. I want this to be entirely a success. If there is one man in the world who deserves to be happy it is Chesterford. He is not brilliant, he does not even think he is, which is the best substitute. It doesn't much matter how hard you are hit if you are well protected. Try to make him conceited—it is the best you can do for him.'

He said these words in a low tone, as if he hardly wished Dodo to hear. But Dodo did hear.

'You don't believe in me a bit,' she said. 'Never mind, I will force you to. That's always the way—as long as I amuse you, you like me well enough, but you distrust me at bottom. A woman's a bore when she is serious. Isn't it so? Because I talk nonsense you think I am entirely untrustworthy about things that matter.'

Dodo struck the ground angrily with the point of her parasol.

'I have thought about it. I know I am right,' she went on. 'I shall be immensely happy as his wife, and he will be immensely happy as my husband.'

'I don't think it's much use discussing it,' said he. 'But don't be vexed with me, Dodo. You reminded me that we were old friends at the beginning of this extremely candid conversation. I have told you that I think it is a mistake. If he didn't love you it wouldn't matter. Unfortunately he does.'

'Well, Jack,' she said, 'I can't prove it, but you ought to know me well enough by this time not to misjudge me so badly. It is not only unjust but stupid, and you are not usually stupid. However, I am not angry with you, which is the result of my beautiful nature. Come, Jack, shake hands and wish me happiness.'

She stood up, holding out both her hands to him. Jack was rather moved.

'Dodo, of course I do. I wish all the best wishes that my nature can desire and my brain conceive, both to you and him, him too; and I hope I shall be outrageously jealous before many months are over.'

He shook her hands, and then dropped them. She stood for a moment with her eyes on the ground, looking still grave. Then she retreated a step or two, leaned against the rail, and broke into a laugh.

'That's right, Jack, begone dull care. I suppose you'll be Chesterford's best man. I shall tell him you must be. Really he is an excellent lover; he doesn't say too much or too little, and he lets me do exactly as I like. Jack, come and see us this evening; we're having a sort of Barnum's Show, and I'm to be the white elephant. Come and be a white elephant too. Oh, no, you can't; Chesterford's the other. The elephant is an amiable beast, and I'm going to be remarkably amiable. Come to dinner first, the Show begins afterwards. No, on the whole, don't come to dinner, because I want to talk to Chesterford all the time, and do my duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Chesterford to ask me to play my part. That's profane, but it's only out of the Catechism. Who wrote the Catechism? I always regard the Catechism as only a half-sacred work, and so profanity doesn't count, at least you may make two profane remarks out of the Catechism, which will only count as one. I shall sing, too. Evelyn has taught me

two little nigger minstrel songs. Shall I black my face? I'm not at all sure that I shouldn't look rather well with my face blacked, though I suppose it would frighten Chesterford. Here are Maud and Bertie back again. I must go. I'm lunching somewhere, I can't remember where, only Maud will know. Maud, where are we lunching, and have you had a nice drive, and has Bertie been making love to you? Good-bye, Jack. Remember to come this evening. You can come, too, Bertie, if you like. I've had a very nice talk with Jack, and he has been remarkably rude, but I forgive him.'

Jack went with her to her dog-cart, and helped her in.

'This pony's name is Beelzebub,' she remarked, as she took the reins, 'because he is the prince of the other things. Good-bye.'

Then he went back and rejoined Bertie.

'There was a scene last night,' said Bertie. 'Maud told me about it. She came home with Dodo and Chesterford, and stopped to open a letter in the hall, and when she went upstairs into the drawing-room, she found Dodo sobbing among the sofa cushions, and Chesterford standing by, not quite knowing what to do.

It appeared that he had just given her the engagement ring. She was awfully pleased with it, and said it was charming, then suddenly she threw it down on the floor, and buried her face in the cushions. After that she rushed out of the room, and didn't appear again for a quarter of an hour, and then went to the Foreign Office party, and to two balls.'

Jack laughed hopelessly for a few minutes. Then he said,—

'It is too ridiculous. I don't believe it can be all real. That was drama, pure spontaneous drama. But it's drama for all that. I'm sure I don't know why I laughed, now I come to think of it. It really is no laughing matter. All the same I wonder why she didn't tell me that. But her sister has got no business to repeat those kind of things. Don't tell anyone else, Bertie.'

Then after a minute he repeated to himself, 'I wonder why she didn't tell me that.'

'Jack,' said Bertie after another pause, 'I don't wish you to think that I want to meddle in your concerns, and so don't tell me unless you like, but was anything ever up between you and Dodo? Lie freely if you would rather not tell me, please.'

'Yes,' he said simply. 'I asked her to marry me last April, and she said "No." I haven't told anyone till this minute, because I don't like it to be known when I fail. I am like Dodo in that. You know how she detests not being able to do anything she wants. It doesn't often happen, but when it does, Dodo becomes damnable. She has more perseverance than I have though. When she can't get anything, she makes such a fuss that she usually does succeed eventually. But I do just the other thing. I go away, and don't say anything about it. That was a bad failure. I remember being very much vexed at the time.'

Jack spoke dreamily, as if he was thinking of something else. It was his way not to blaze abroad anything that affected him deeply. Like Dodo he would often dissect himself in a superficial manner, and act as a kind of showman to his emotions; but he did not care to turn himself inside out with her thoroughness. And above all, as he had just said, he hated the knowledge of failure; he tried to conceal it even from himself. He loved to show his brighter side to the world. When he was in society he always put on his best mental

and moral clothes, those that were newest and fitted him most becomingly; the rags and tatters were thrown deep into the darkest cupboard, and the key sternly turned on them. Now and then, however, as on this occasion, a friend brought him the key with somewhat embarrassing openness, and manners prevented him from putting his back to the door. But when it was unlocked he adopted the tone of 'Yes, there are some old things in there, I believe. May you see? Oh, certainly; but please shut it after you, and don't let anyone else in. I quite forget what is in there myself, it's so long since I looked.'

Bertie was silent. He was on those terms of intimacy with the other that do not need ordinary words of condolence or congratulation. Besides, from his own point of view, he inwardly congratulated Jack, and this was not the sort of occasion on which to tell him that congratulation rather than sympathy was what the event demanded. Then Jack went on, still with the air of a spectator than of a principal character,—

'Dodo talked to me a good deal about her marriage. I am sorry about it, for I think that

Chesterford will be terribly disillusioned. You know he doesn't take things lightly, and he is much too hopelessly fond of Dodo ever to be content with what she will grant him as a wife. But we cannot do anything. I told her what I thought, not because I hoped to make any change in the matter, but because I wished her to know that for once in her life she has made a failure—a bad, hopeless mistake. That has been my revenge. Come, it's after one, I must go home. I shall go there this evening; shall I see you?'

CHAPTER II.

JACK went home meditating rather bitterly on things in general. He had a sense that Fate was not behaving very prettily to him. She had dealt him rather a severe blow in April last, which had knocked him down, and, having knocked him down, she now proceeded in a most unsportsmanlike way to kick him. Jack had a great idea of fair play, and Fate certainly was not playing fair. He would have liked to have a few words with her on the subject. The world had been very kind on the whole to him. He had always been popular, and his life, though perhaps rather aimless, was at least enjoyable. And since the world had been kind to him, he was generous to the world in general, and to his friends in particular. It had always held a high opinion of him as a thoroughly healthy-minded and pleasant companion, and he was disposed to hold a similar opinion of

it. Consequently, when Dodo had refused him that spring, he had not thought badly of her. He did not blame her, or get bitter about it; but though he had flattered himself that he was used to Dodo's ways, and had always recognised her capabilities in the way of surprising her friends, he had not been quite prepared for the news of her engagement. In fact, he was surprised, and also rather resentful, chiefly against the general management of mundane affairs, but partly also against Dodo herself. Dodo had not told him of her engagement; he had been left to find it out for himself. Then, again, she was engaged to a man who was hopelessly and entirely in love with her, and for whom, apart from a quiet, unemotional liking, she did not care two straws, except in so far as he was immensely rich, and had a title, two golden keys which unlocked the most secret doors of that well-furnished apartment known as Society, which constituted Dodo's world. Hitherto her position had been precarious: she had felt that she was on trial. Her personality, her great attractiveness and talents, had secured for herself a certain footing on the very dais of that room; but she had always known that unless she married brilliantly she would not be sure of her

position. If she married a man who would not be always certain of commanding whatever money and position—for she would never have married a wealthy brewer—could command, or, worst of all, if in her unwillingness to accept anything but the best she could get, she did not marry at all, Dodo knew that she never would have that unquestioned position that she felt was indispensable to her. Jack knew all this perfectly well—in fact Dodo had referred to it that morning—and he accepted it philosophically, as being inevitable. But what he did not like was being told that he would not have done on general grounds, that he was too fond of his own way, that he would not have given Dodo rein enough. He had known Dodo too long and too well, when he proposed to her, to have any of a lover's traditional blindness to the faults of his love. He knew that she was, above all things, strongly dramatic, that she moved with a view to effect, that she was unscrupulous in what she did, that her behaviour was sometimes in questionable taste ; but this he swallowed whole, so to speak. He was genuinely attached to her, and felt that she possessed the qualities that he would most like to have in his wife. Bertie had said to him

that morning that she was stimulating, and would not wear well. Stimulating she certainly was—what lovable woman is not—and personally he had known her long, and she did wear well. The hidden depths and unsuspected shallows were exactly what he loved her for; no one ever fell in love with a canal; and though the shallows were commoner than the depths, and their presence was sometimes indicated by a rather harsh jarring of the keel, yet he believed, fully and sincerely, in the dark, mysterious depths for love to lose itself in. Besides, a wife, whose actions and thoughts were as perfectly calculable and as accurately calculated as the trains in a Bradshaw, was possessed of sterling qualities which, however estimable, were more suited to a housekeeper than a mistress.

These reflections were the outcome of an intimate knowledge of Dodo in the mind of a man who was in the habit of being honest with himself and the object of his love, a quality rare enough whether the lover is rejected or accepted.

He had had time to think over the matter quietly to himself. He knew, and had known now for many weeks, that Dodo was out of his reach, and he sat

down and thought about the inaccessible fruit, not with the keen feelings of one who still hoped to get it, but with a resignation which recognised that the fruit was desirable, but that it must be regarded from a purely speculative point of view.

And to do him justice, though he was very sorry for himself, he was much more sorry for Chesterford. Chesterford was his cousin, they had been brought up together at Eton and Oxford, and he knew him with that intimacy which is the result of years alone. Chesterford's old friends had all a great respect and liking for him. As Dodo had said, 'He was an honest man if you like.' Slight acquaintances called him slow and rather stupid, which was true on purely intellectual grounds. He was very loyal, and very much devoted to what he considered his duty, which consisted in being an excellent landlord and J.P. of his county, in voting steadily for the Conservative party in the House of Lords, in giving largely and anonymously to good objects, in going to church on Sunday morning, where he sang hymns with fervour, and read lessons with respect, in managing a hunt in a liberal and satisfactory manner, and in avoiding any introspection or speculation about problems of

life and being. He walked through the world with an upright gait, without turning his eyes or his steps to the right hand or the left, without ever concerning himself with what was not his business, but directing all his undoubtedly sterling qualities to that. He had a perfect genius for doing his duty. Nobody had ever called him shallow or foolish, but nobody on the other hand had ever called him either deep or clever. He had probably only made one real mistake in his life, and that was when he asked Dodo to marry him; and we have seen that Jack, who knew Dodo well, and whose opinion might be considered to be based on good grounds, thought that Dodo had committed her first grand error in accepting him. The worst of the business certainly was that he was in love with Dodo. If he had been a different sort of man, if he had proposed to Dodo with the same idea that Dodo had, when she accepted him, if he had wanted a brilliant and fascinating woman to walk through life with, who could not fail to be popular, and who would do the duties of a mistress of a great house in a regal fashion, he could not have chosen better. But what he wanted in a wife was someone to love. He loved Dodo, and

apparently it had not entered his calculations that she, in accepting him, might be doing it from a different standpoint from his own in proposing to her. Dodo had smiled on him with the air of a benignant goddess who marries a mortal, when he offered her his hand and heart, and he had taken that smile as a fulfilment of his own thought. Decidedly Jack might have justification for feeling apprehensive.

Jack's only hope lay in that vein which did exist in Dodo, and which she had manifested in that outburst of tears the night before. He put it down to her dramatic instincts to a large extent, but he knew there was something beside, for Dodo did not care to play to an empty house, and the presence of her future husband alone, constituted anything but a satisfactory audience. Jack had always had a considerable belief in Dodo: her attractiveness and cleverness were, of course, beyond dispute, and required proof no more than the fact that the sun rose in the morning, but he believed in something deeper than this, which prompted such actions as these. He felt that there was some emotion that she experienced at that moment, of which her tears were

the legitimate outcome, and, as he thought of this, there occurred to him the remark that Dodo had made that morning, when she expressed her regret at never having felt the sort of love that she knew Chesterford felt for her.

Mrs Vane was perhaps perfectly happy that night. Was not her daughter engaged to a marquis and a millionaire? Was not her house going to be filled with the brightest and best of our land? She had often felt rather resentful against Dodo, who alternately liked and despised people whom Mrs Vane would have given her right hand to be in a position to like, and both hands to be in a position to despise. Dodo was excellent friends with 'London,' only 'London' did not come and seek her at her own house, but preferred asking her to theirs. Consequently, on Mrs Vane and Maud devolved the comparatively menial duty of leaving their cards and those of Dodo, and attending her in the capacity of the necessary adjunct. They would be asked to the same houses as Dodo, but that was all; when they got there they had the privilege of seeing Dodo performing her brilliant evolutions, but somehow none of Dodo's glory got reflected on to them. To be

the mirror of Dodo was one of Mrs Vane's most cherished ideas, and she did not recollect that there are many substances whose nature forbids their acting as such to the most brilliant of illuminations. Mr Vane was kept still more in the background. It was generally supposed that he was looking after his affairs in the country, while the rest of the family were amusing themselves in London. It was well known that he was the proprietor of a flourishing iron foundry somewhere in Lancashire, and apparently the iron needed special care during the months of May, June and July. In any case he was a shadow in the background, rather than a skeleton at the banquet, whom it was not necessary to ignore, because he never appeared in a position in which he could be ignored. Mrs Vane had two principal objects in life, the first of which was to live up to Dodo, and the second to obtain, in course of time, a suitably brilliant son-in-law. The latter of these objects had been practically obtained by Dodo herself, and the first of them was in a measure realised by the large and brilliant company who assembled in her rooms that night.

Mrs Vane was a large, high-coloured woman of

about forty, whose dress seemed to indicate that she would rather be thirty, but that, of course, may only have been the fault of the dressmaker. She had an effusive manner, which sometimes made her guests wonder what they could have done, to have made her so particularly glad to see them. She constantly lamented Mr Vane's absence from London, and remarked, with a brilliant smile, that she felt quite deserted. Mrs Vane's smile always suggested a reformed vampire, who had permanently renounced her blood-thirsty habits, but had not quite got out of the way of gloating on what would have been her victims in the unregenerate days. It is only fair to say that this impression was due to the immensity of her smile, which could hardly be honestly accounted for by this uncharitable world. She was busily employed in receiving her guests when Jack came, and was, perhaps, more stupendously cordial than ever.

'So kind of you to come,' she was just saying to a previous arrival when Jack came in. 'I know Dodo was dying to see you and be congratulated. Darling,' she said, turning to Maud, 'run and tell Dodo that Lord Burwell has arrived. So good of

you to come. And how do you do, dear Mr Broxton? Of course Dodo has told you of our happiness. Thanks, yes—we are all charmed with her engagement. And the Marquis is your cousin, is he not? How nice! May I tell Maud she may call you Cousin Jack? *Such* a pleasure to have you! Dodo is simply expiring to see you. Did she see you this morning? Really! she never told me of it, and my sweet child usually tells me everything.'

Dodo was playing the amiable white elephant to some purpose. She was standing under a large chandelier in the centre of the room, with Chesterford beside her, receiving congratulations with the utmost grace, and talking nonsense at the highest possible speed. Jack thought to himself that he had never seen anyone so thoroughly charming and brilliant, and almost wondered whether he had not been doing her an injustice all day. He saw it was impossible to get near her for the present, so he wandered off among other groups, exchanging greetings and salutations. He had made the circuit of the room, and was standing about near the door, feeling a little lonely, when Dodo came quickly

towards him. She was looking rather white and impatient.

'Come away out of this, Jack,' she said; 'this is horrible. We've done our duty, and now I want to talk. I've been smiling and grinning till my cheeks are nearly cracked, and everyone says exactly the same thing. Come to my room—come.' She turned round, beckoning to him, and found herself face to face with Chesterford. 'Dear old boy,' she said to him, 'I'm not going to bore you any more to-night. I shall bore you enough after we're married. Jack and I are going away to talk, and he's going to tell me to be a good girl, and do as his cousin bids me. Good-night; come again to-morrow morning.'

'I came here on purpose to congratulate you,' said Jack, grasping Chesterford's hand, 'and I wish you all joy and prosperity.'

'Come, Jack,' said Dodo. 'Oh, by the way, Chesterford, ask Jack to be your best man. You couldn't have a better, and you haven't got any brother, you know.'

'I was just going to,' said Chesterford. 'Jack, you will be, won't you? You must.'

'Of course I will,' said Jack. 'All the same we're

all awfully jealous of you, you know, for carrying Dodo off.'

'So you ought to be,' said he enthusiastically. 'Why, I'm almost jealous of myself. But now go and talk to Dodo, if she wants you.

The sight of Chesterford with Dodo made Jack groan in spirit. He had accepted Dodo's rejection of him as quite final, and he never intended to open that closed book again. But this was too horrible. He felt a genuine impulse of pure compassion for Chesterford, and an irritated disgust for Dodo. Dodo was an admirable comrade, and, for some, he thought, an admirable wife. But the idea of her in comradeship with Chesterford was too absurd, and if she could never be his comrade, by what perversity of fate was it that she was going to become his wife? Jack's serenity was quite gone, and he wondered what had become of it. All he was conscious of was a chafing refusal to acquiesce just yet, and the anticipation of a somewhat intimate talk with Dodo. He felt half inclined to run away from the house, and not see her again, and as he followed her up to her room, he began to think that his wisdom had followed his serenity. After all, if

he asked her again about her resolution to marry Chesterford, what was he doing but continuing the conversation they had in the Park that morning, in which Dodo herself had taken the initiative. 'These things are on the knees of the gods,' thought Jack to himself piously, as the door of Dodo's room closed behind him. Dodo threw herself down in a low arm-chair with an air of weariness.

'Go on talking to me, Jack,' she said. 'Interest me, soothe me, make me angry if you like. Chesterford's very nice. Don't you like him immensely? I do.'

Jack fidgeted, lit a match and blew it out again. Really it was not his fault that the conversation was going to be on this subject. He again laid the responsibility on the knees of the gods. Then he said,—

'Dodo, is this irrevocable? Are you determined to marry this man? I swear I don't ask you for any selfish reasons, but only because I am sincerely anxious for your happiness and his. It is a confounded liberty I am taking, but I sha'n't apologise for it. I know that it isn't any business of mine, but I risk your displeasure.'

Dodo was looking at him steadily. Her breath

came rather quickly, and the look of weariness had left her face.

'Jack,' she said, 'don't say this sort of thing to me again. You are quite right, it is a confounded liberty, as you say. I shall do as I please in this matter. Ah, Jack, don't be angry with me,' she went on as he shrugged his shoulders, and half turned away. 'I know you are sincere, but I must do it. I want to be safe. I want to be married. Chesterford is very safe. Jack, old boy, don't make me quarrel with you. You are the best friend I have, but I'm sure you're wrong about this.'

She rose and stood by him, and laid one hand on his as it lay on the mantelpiece. He did not answer her. He was disappointed and baffled. Then she turned away from him, and suddenly threw up her arms.

'Oh, my God,' she said, 'I don't know what to do. It isn't my fault that I am made like this. I want to know what love is, and I can't—I can't. You say I shall make him unhappy, and I don't want to do that. I don't believe I shall. Jack, why did you come here suggesting these horrible things?'

There was a great anger in her voice, and she stood trembling before him.

Just then the door opened, and a middle-aged lady walked in. She did not seem at all surprised. Nobody who had known Dodo long was often surprised.

She walked up to Dodo and kissed her.

'I came late,' she said, 'and your mother said you were in your room, so I came up to congratulate you with all my heart.'

'Thank you very much,' said Dodo, returning the kiss. 'Jack, do you know Mrs Vivian? — Mr Broxton.'

Mrs Vivian bowed, and Jack bowed, and then nobody seemed quite to know what to say next. Mrs Vivian recovered herself first.

'I wish you would show me the necklace Lord Chesterford has given you,' she said to Dodo. 'Mrs Vane said the diamonds were magnificent.'

'Certainly, I will fetch it,' said Dodo, with unusual docility. 'Don't go away, Jack.'

Dodo left the room, and Mrs Vivian turned to Jack.

'My dear young man,' she said, 'I am old enough to be your mother, and you mustn't mind what I am

going to say. This sort of thing won't do at all. I know who you are perfectly well, and I warn you that you are playing with fire. You were at liberty to do so before Dodo was engaged, and I daresay you have burned your fingers already. Several young men have—but now it won't do. Besides that, it isn't fair on either Chesterford or Dodo herself.'

Jack wanted to think 'what an impertinent old woman,' but there was something in her manner that forbade it.

'I believe you are right,' he said simply; 'but it wasn't wholly my fault.'

Then he felt angry with himself for having shifted any of the blame on to Dodo.

'*Honi soit*,' said the other ambiguously. 'I don't mean that— Ah, here is Dodo.'

The diamonds were duly shown and admired, and the three went downstairs again.

Mrs Vivian took her leave shortly. She was very gracious to Jack, and as they parted she said,—

'Come and see me at any time; I should like to talk to you. Here is my address.'

Jack sought Mrs Vane to inquire who Mrs Vivian was. Mrs Vane was even more effusive than usual.

'Oh, she is quite one of our leading people,' she said. 'She has not been in London, or, in fact, in England for two years. She was unhappily married. Her husband was a scamp, and after his death she suddenly left London, and has only just returned. She is quite an extraordinary woman—everyone used to rave about her. She never gave herself airs, but somehow she was more looked up to than anyone else. Quite royal in fact. I feel immensely honoured by her presence here. I hardly dared to ask her—so fascinating, and so clever.'

Dodo came up to Jack before he left.

'Jack,' she said, 'I was angry with you, and I am sorry. Don't bear me malice. If Mrs Vivian had not come in, I should have said something abominable. I am afraid of her. I don't quite know why. She always seems to be taking stock of one, and noticing how very small one is. Don't forget to-morrow. We're all going on a water-party at Richmond. Mind you come.'

'I think I had better not,' said Jack bluntly.

Dodo lifted her eyebrows in surprise that may have been genuine.

'Why not?' she asked.

Jack had no reasonable answer to give her.

'What did Mrs Vivian say to you?' asked Dodo suddenly.

Jack paused.

'A few polite nothings,' he said; 'and half the royal motto. Mrs Vane said she was quite royal, which, of course, explains it.'

'I can't conceive what you're talking about,' remarked Dodo. 'It seems to me to be sheer nonsense.'

Jack smiled.

'On the whole, I think it is sheer nonsense,' he said. 'Yes, I'll come.'

Dodo swept him the prettiest little curtsey.

'How good of you,' she said. 'Good-night, Jack Don't be cross, it really isn't worth while, and you can behave so prettily if you like. Oh, such a nice gentleman!'

'No, I expect it isn't worth while,' said Jack.

CHAPTER III.

THERE is a particular beauty about the Thames valley for which you may search for years elsewhere, and not find ; a splendid lavishness in the way that the woods are cast down broadcast along the river, and a princely extravagance of thick lush hayfields, that seem determined not to leave a spare inch of land between them and the water. The whole scene has been constructed with a noble disregard of expense, in the way of water, land and warm woodland air. The tall, clean-limbed beech-trees have room to stretch their great, lazy arms without being prosecuted for their clumsy trespasses, and the squirrels that chatter at you from their green houses seem to have a quite unusual sleekness about them, and their insolent criticisms to each other about your walk, and general personal unattractiveness, are inspired by a larger share of animal spirits than those

of other squirrels. As you row gently up in the middle of the stream, you may see a heron standing in the shallows, too lazy to fish, too supremely confident to mind the approach of anything so inferior as yourself, and from the cool shadow of the woods, you may hear an old cock pheasant talking to himself, and not troubling to practise a new and original method of rocketing in June, for he knows that his time is not yet.

At this time of year, too, you need not trouble to look round, to see if there are large boats full of noisy people bearing down on you; like the pheasant, their time is not yet. But now and then the long strings of creamy bubbles appearing on the deep, quiet water, and a sound rich in associations of cool plunges into frothy streams, warns you that a lock is near. And above you may see some small village clustering down to the river's edge, to drink of its sweet coolness, or a couple of shaggy-footed cart-horses, looking with mild wonder at this unexpected method of locomotion, lifting their dripping noses from the bright gravelly shallows to stare at you, before they proceed to finish their evening watering.

Dodo was very fond of the Thames valley, and

she really enjoyed giving up a day of June in London to the woods and waters. They were to start quite early in the morning, Dodo explained, and everyone was to wear their very oldest clothes, for they were going to play ducks and drakes, and drink milk in dairies, and pick buttercups, and get entirely covered with freckles. Dodo herself never freckled, and she was conscious of looking rather better for a slight touch of sun, and it would be very dear of Mrs Vivian if she would come too, if she didn't mind being silly all day; and, if so, would she call for them, as they were on her way. Chesterford, of course, was going, and Jack, and Maud and her mother; it was quite a small party; and wasn't Jack a dear?

Mrs Vane had got hold of a certain idea about Mrs Vivian, distinctly founded on fact. She was one of those women who cannot help making an impression. How it is done, or exactly what it is, one would be puzzled to define, but everyone noticed when she came into a room, and was aware when she went out. It was not her personal appearance, for she was short rather than tall, stout rather than graceful, and certainly middle-aged rather than young. Dodo has mentioned the effect she produced on her, and many

people felt in the same way that Mrs Vivian was somehow on a higher plane than they, that her mind was cast in a larger mould. Happily for our peace of mind such people are not very common ; most of our fellow-men are luckily much on the same level, and they are not more than units among units. But Mrs Vivian was much more than a unit. Dodo had said of her that she was two or three at least. And evidently nothing was further from Mrs Vivian's wishes than trying to make an impression, in fact, the very impressive element was rather due to her extreme naturalness. We are most of us so accustomed to see people behave, and to behave ourselves, in a manner not quite natural, that to see anyone who never does so, is in itself calculated to make one rather nervous.

Mrs Vivian evidently intended to take her life up again at the point where she had left off, so to speak—in other words, at the period before her marriage. Of her husband, perhaps, the less said the better. He died, owing to an accident, after ten years of married unhappiness, and left Mrs Vivian poorer than she had been before. After his death she had travelled abroad for two years, and then

returned to England to live with her sister, who had married a rich judge and kept house rather magnificently in Prince's Gate. Mrs Fuller had always disapproved of her sister's marriage, and she was heartily glad to see her well quit of her husband, and, on her return to England, received her with open arms, and begged her, on behalf of her husband and herself, to make their home hers. Mrs Vivian accordingly settled down in the 'extremely commodious' house in Prince's Gate, and, as I said, took up her life where it had left off. A standing grievance that her husband had had with her was, that she interested herself in the poor, and in the East End slums, that she went to cabmen's shelters, and espoused the cause of overdriven factory girls. He had told her that it was meddling with other people's business; that nothing was so objectionable as an assumption of charitable airs; that a woman who went to balls and dinner-parties was a hypocrite if she pretended to care about the state of the poor, and that she only did it because she wished to appear unlike other people. But he altogether failed to perceive that her actions were entirely uninfluenced by the impression they were to make, and mistook

her extreme naturalness for the subtlest affectation. However, Mrs Vivian resolutely banished from her mind the remembrance of those ten years, and being unable to think of her husband with tenderness or affection, she preferred to forget her married life altogether. The Vanes had been their neighbours in the country for many years, and she had known Dodo since she was a child. Dodo had once asked to accompany her in her visits to the East End, and had been immensely struck by what she saw, and determined to be charitable too. This sort of thing seemed extremely chic to Dodo's observant mind. So she took up a factory of miserable match-girls, and asked them all to tea, and got Mrs Vivian to promise her help ; but when the afternoon came, Dodo particularly wished to go to a morning concert, and on Mrs Vivian's arrival she found, indeed, plenty of match-girls, but no Dodo. Dodo came back later and made herself extremely fascinating. She kissed the cleanest of the girls, and patted the rest on the shoulder, and sang several delightful little French songs to them to her own accompaniment on the banjo, and thanked Mrs Vivian for being 'such a dear about

the slums.' But on the next occasion when she had nothing to do, and called on Mrs Vivian to ask to be taken to another of those 'darling little slums,' Mrs Vivian hinted that, though she would be charmed to take her, she thought that Dodo had perhaps forgotten that the Four-in-hand Club met that day in Hyde Park. Dodo had forgotten it, and, as she had bespoken the box seat on one of her friends' coaches, she hurried home again, feeling it freshly borne in upon her that Mrs Vivian thought she was very contemptible indeed.

Altogether Mrs Vivian knew Dodo well, and when she went home that evening, she thought a good deal about the approaching marriage. She was glad to have had that occasion of speaking to Jack, he seemed to her to be worth doing it for. She knew that she ran the risk of being told, in chillingly polite English, that she was stepping outside her province, and that Jack did not belong to the East End class who welcomed any charitable hand; but she had a remarkably keen eye, and her intuitive perception told her at once that Jack's sense of the justice of her remark would stifle any feeling he might have that she was

officious and meddlesome, and the event had justified her decision.

In the course of the next few days she met Jack several times. They both went to the water-party Dodo spoke of, and she took the opportunity to cultivate his acquaintance.

They were sitting on the bank of the river below the Cliveden woods, a little apart from the others, and she felt that as he had behaved so well, she owed him some apology.

'It was very nice of you, Mr Broxton,' she said, 'to be so polite to me last night. To tell you the truth, I did know you, though you didn't know me. I was an old friend of your mother's, but I hadn't time to explain that, and you were good enough to take me without explanations. I always wonder what our attitude towards old friends of our mothers ought to be. I really don't see why they should have any claim upon one.'

Jack laughed.

'The fact was that I knew you were right as soon as you spoke to me, though I wanted to resent it. I had been putting it differently to myself; that was why I spoke to Dodo.'

'Tell me more,' she said. 'From the momentary glance I had of you and her, I thought you had been remonstrating with her, and she had been objecting. I don't blame you for remonstrating in the general way. Dodo's conduct used not to be always blameless. But it looked private, and that was what I did object to. I daresay you think me a tiresome, impertinent, old woman.'

Jack felt more strongly than ever that this woman could not help being well-bred in whatever she did.

'It sounds disloyal to one's friends, I know,' he said, 'but it was because I really did care for both of them that I acted as I did. What will happen will be that he will continue to adore her, and by degrees she will begin to hate him. He will not commit suicide, and I don't think Dodo will make a scandal. Her regard for appearances alone would prevent that. It would be a confession of failure.'

Mrs Vivian looked grave.

'Did you tell Dodo this?'

'More or less,' he replied. 'Except about the scandal and the suicide.'

Mrs Vivian's large, grey, serious eyes twinkled with some slight amusement.

I think while I was about it I should have told her that too,' she said; 'that's the sort of argument that appeals to Dodo. You have to scream if you want her to listen to what she doesn't want to hear. But I don't think it was quite well judged of you, you know.'

'I think she ought to know it,' said Jack, 'though I realise I ought to have been the last person to tell her, for several reasons.'

Mrs Vivian looked at him inquiringly.

'You mean for fear of her putting a wrong construction on it? I see,' she said.

Jack felt it could not have been more delicately done.

'How did you know?' he asked.

'Oh,' she said, 'that is the kind of intuition which is the only consolation we women have for getting old. We are put on the shelf, no doubt, after a certain age, but we get a habit of squinting down into the room below. That is the second time I have shown myself a meddling old woman, and you have treated me very nicely both times. Let us join the others. I see tea is ready.'

Dodo meanwhile had walked Chesterford off

among the green, cool woods that bordered the river. She had given Jack's remarks a good deal of consideration, and, whether or no she felt that he was justified in them on present data, she determined that she would make the event falsify his predictions. Dodo had an unlimited capacity for interfering in the course of destiny. She devoted herself to her aims, whatever they might be, with a wonderful singleness of purpose, and since it is a fact that one usually gets what one wants in this world, if one tries hard enough, it followed that up to this time she had, on the whole, usually got her way. But she was now dealing with an unknown quantity, which she could not gauge. She had confessed to Jack her inability to understand what love meant, and it was with a certain sense of misgiving that she felt that her answers for the future would be expressed in terms of that unknown quantity 'x.' To Dodo's concrete mind this was somewhat discouraging, but she determined to do her best to reduce things to an equation in which the value of 'x' could be found in terms of some of those many symbols which she did know.

Dodo had an inexhaustible fund of vivacity, which

was a very useful instrument to her; like a watch-key that fits all watches, she was able to apply it as required to very different pieces of mechanism. When she wished to do honour to a melancholy occasion, for instance, her vivacity turned any slight feeling of sorrow she had into hysterical weeping; when the occasion was joyful, it became a torrent of delightful nonsense. To-day the occasion was distinctly joyful. She had a large sense of success. Chesterford was really a very desirable lover; his immense wealth answered exactly the requirements of Dodo's wishes. Furthermore, he was safe and easily satisfied; the day was charming; Jack was there; she had had a very good lunch, and was shortly going to have a very good tea; and Chesterford had given orders for his yacht to be in readiness to take them off for a delightful honeymoon, directly after their marriage—in short, all her circumstances were wholly satisfactory. She had said to him after lunch, as they were sitting on the grass, 'Come away into those delicious woods, and leave these stupid people here,' and he was radiant in consequence, for, to tell the truth, she had been rather indulgent of his company than

eager for it the last day or two. She was in the highest spirits as they strolled away.

'Oh do give me a cigarette,' she said, as soon as they had got out of sight. 'I didn't dare smoke with that Vivian woman there. Chesterford, I am frightened of her. She is as bad as the Inquisition, or that odious man in Browning who used to walk about, and tell the king if anything happened. I am sure she puts it down in a book whenever I say anything I shouldn't. You know that's so tantalising. It is a sort of challenge to be improper. Chesterford, if you put down in a book anything I do wrong, I swear I shall go to the bad altogether.'

To Chesterford this seemed the most attractive nonsense that ever flowed from female lips.

'Why, you can't do anything wrong, Dodo,' he said simply; 'at least not what I think wrong. And what does it matter what other people think?'

Dodo patted his hand, and blew him a kiss approvingly.

'That's quite right,' she said; 'bear that in mind and we shall never have a quarrel. Chester-

ford, we won't quarrel at all, will we? Everybody else does, I suppose, now and then, and that proves it's vulgar. Mrs Vivian used to quarrel with her husband, so she's vulgar. Oh, I'm so glad she's vulgar. I sha'n't care how much she looks at me now. Bother! I believe it was only her husband who used to swear at her. Never mind, he must have been vulgar to do that, and she must have vulgar tastes to have married a vulgar person. I don't think I'm vulgar, do you? Really, it's a tremendous relief to have found out that she's vulgar. But I am afraid I shall forget it when I see her again. You must remind me. You must point at her and say V, if you can manage it. Or are you afraid of her too?'

'Oh, never mind Mrs Vivian,' said he, 'she can wait.'

'That's what she's always doing,' said Dodo. 'Waiting and watching with large serious eyes. I can't think why she does it, for she doesn't make use of it afterwards. Now when I know something discreditable of a person, if I dislike him, I tell everybody else, and if I like him, I tell him that I know all about it, and I am *so* sorry for him. Then he thinks

you are charming and sympathetic, and you have a devoted admirer for life.'

Chesterford laughed. He had no desire to interrupt this rapid monologue of Dodo's. He was quite content to play the part of the Greek chorus.

'I'm going to sit down here,' continued Dodo. 'Do you mind my smoking cigarettes? I'm not sure that it is in good form, but I mean to make it so. I want to be the fashion. Would you like your wife to be the fashion?'

He bent over her as she sat with her head back, smiling up at him.

'My darling,' he said, 'do you know, I really don't care a straw whether you are the fashion or not, as long as you are satisfied. You might stand on your head in Piccadilly if you liked, and I would come and stand too. All I care about is that you are you, and that you have made me the happiest man on God's earth.'

Dodo was conscious again of the presence of this unknown quantity. She would much prefer striking it out altogether; it seemed to have quite an unreasonable preponderance.

Chesterford did not usually make jokes, in fact she had never heard him make one before, and his remark about standing on his head, seemed to be only accounted for by this perplexing factor. Dodo had read about love in poems and novels, and had seen something of it, too, but it remained a puzzle to her. She hoped her calculations might not prove distressingly incorrect owing to this inconvenient factor. But she laughed with her habitual sincerity, and replied,—

'What a good idea; let's do it to-morrow morning. Will ten suit you? We can let windows in all the houses round. I'm sure there would be a crowd to see us. It really would be interesting, though perhaps not a very practical thing to do. I wonder if Mrs Vivian would come. She would put down a very large bad mark to me for that, but I shall tell her it was your suggestion.'

Chesterford laughed with pure pleasure.

'Dodo,' he said, 'you are not fair on Mrs Vivian. She is a very good woman.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that,' said Dodo, 'but you see being good doesn't necessarily make one a pleasant companion. Now, I'm not a bit good, but you must

confess you would rather talk to me than to the Vivian.'

'Oh, you are different,' said he rapturously. 'You are Dodo.'

Dodo smiled contentedly—this man was so easy to please. She had felt some slight dismay at Jack's ill-omened prophecies, but Jack was preposterously wrong about this.

They rejoined the others in course of time. Dodo made fearful ravages on the eatables, and after tea she suddenly announced,—

'Mrs Vivian, I'm going to smoke a cigarette. Do you feel dreadfully shocked?'

Mrs Vivian laughed.

'My dear Dodo, I should never venture to be shocked at anything you did. You are so complete that I should be afraid to spoil you utterly, if I tried to suggest corrections.'

Dodo lit a cigarette with a slightly defiant air. Mrs Vivian's manner had been entirely sincere, but she felt the same sort of resentment that a prisoner might feel if the executioner made sarcastic remarks to him. She looked on Mrs Vivian as a sort of walking Inquisition.

'My darling Dodo,' murmured Mrs Vane, 'I do so wish you would not smoke, it will ruin your teeth entirely.'

Dodo turned to Mrs Vivian.

'That means you think it would be very easy to spoil me, as you call it.'

'Not at all,' said that lady. 'I don't understand you, that's all, and I might be pulling out the key-stone of the arch unawares. Not that I suppose your character depends upon your smoking.'

Dodo leaned back and laughed.

'Oh, this is too dreadfully subtle,' she exclaimed, 'I want to unbend my mind. Chesterford, come and talk to me, you are deliciously unbending.'

CHAPTER IV.

LORD and Lady Chesterford were expected home on the 6th of December. The marriage took place late in August, and they had gone off on the yacht directly afterwards, in order to spend a few warm months in the Mediterranean. Dodo had written home occasionally to Mrs Vane, and now and then to Jack. To Jack her letters had never been more than a word or two, simply saying that they were enjoying themselves enormously, and that Jack had been hopelessly wrong. Mrs Vane also had much reason to be satisfied. She had spent her autumn in a variety of fashionable watering-places, where her dresses had always been the awe and wonder of the town; she had met many acquaintances, to whom she had poured out her rapture over Dodo's marriage; had declared that Chesterford was most charming, and that he and Dodo were quite another Adam and Eve

in Paradise, and that she was really quite jealous of Dodo. When they left England, they had intended to spend the winter abroad and not come back till February, but early in December a telegram had arrived at Winston, Lord Chesterford's country house, saying that they would be back in ten days. About the same time Jack received a letter, saying that their change of plans was solely owing to the fact that Dodo was rather tired of the sea, and the weather was bad, and that she had never been so happy in her life. Dodo's eagerness to assure Jack of this struck him as being in rather bad taste. She ought to have entirely ignored his warnings. The happiness of a newly-married woman ought to be so absorbing, as to make her be unaware of the existence of other people; and this consciousness in Dodo of her triumphant superiority of knowledge, led him to suppose he was right rather than wrong. He was unfeignedly sorry not to be sure that she had been right. When he told Dodo that he wished to be jealous of Chesterford, he was quite sincere. Since he could not have Dodo himself, at any rate let her make someone happy. Dodo also informed him that they were going to have a house-party that

Christmas and that he must come, and she had asked Mrs Vivian, to show that she wasn't afraid of her any longer, and that Maud was coming, and she wished Jack would marry her. Then followed a dozen other names belonging to Dodo's private and particular set, who had all been rather disgusted at her marrying what they chose to call a Philistine. It had been quite hoped that she would marry Jack. Jack was not a Philistine at all, though the fact of his having proposed to her remained a secret. Maud, on the other hand, was a Philistine; and it was one of Dodo's merits that she did not drop those who originally had claims on her, when she became the fashion. She was constantly trying to bring Maud into notice, but Maud resisted the most well-meant shoves. She had none of Dodo's vivacity and talents; in fact, her talents lay chiefly in the direction of arranging the places at a dinner-party, and in doing a great deal of unnecessary worsted work. What happened to her worsted work nobody ever knew. It was chiefly remarkable for its predominance of dropped stitches, and a suggestion of damaged goods about it, in consequence of much handling. To Dodo it seemed an incredible

stupidity that anyone should do worsted work, or, if they did do it, not do it well. She used to tell Maud that it was done much more cheaply in shops, and much better. Then Maud would drop it for a time, and take to playing the piano, but that was even more oppressively stupid to Dodo's mind than the worsted work. Maud had a perfect genius for not letting her right hand know what her left hand was doing, a principle which was abhorrent to Dodo in every application. The consequence of all this was, that Dodo was apt to regard her sister as a failure, though she still, as in the present instance, liked giving Maud what she considered a helping hand. It must be confessed that Dodo's efforts were not altogether unselfish. She liked her environment to be as great a success as herself, as it thus added to her own completeness, just as a picture looks better in a good frame than in a shabby one. Maud, however, had no desire to be a success. She was perfectly happy to sit in the background and do the worsted work. She longed to be let alone. At times she would make her escape to the iron works and try to cultivate the domestic virtues in attending to her father. She thought

with a kind of envy of the daughters of country clergymen, whose mediocre piano-playing was invaluable to penny readings and village concerts, and for whose worsted work there was a constant demand, in view of old women and alms-houses. She had hoped that Dodo's slumming experiences would bring her into connection with this side of life, and had dispensed tea and buns with a kind of rapture on the occasion of Dodo's tea-party, but her sister had dropped her slums, as we have seen, at this point, and Maud was too shy and uninitiative to take them up alone. She had an excellent heart, but excellent hearts were out of place in Mrs Vane's establishment. Dodo had confessed her inability to deal with them.

Dodo's general invitation to Jack was speedily followed by a special one from Winston, naming the first week in January as the time of the party. Jack was met on his arrival by Chesterford, and as they drove back the latter gave him particulars about the party in the house.

'They are chiefly Dodo's friends,' he said. 'Do you know, Jack, except for you, I think I am rather afraid of Dodo's friends, they are so dreadfully clever,

you know. Of course they are all very charming, but they talk about character. Now I don't care to talk about character. I know a good man when I see him, and that's all that matters as far as I can judge. Dodo was saying last night that her potentiality for good was really much stronger than her potentiality for evil, and that her potentiality for evil was only skin deep, and they all laughed, and said they didn't believe it. And Dodo said, "Ask Chesterford if it isn't," and God only knows what I said.'

Jack laughed.

'Poor old fellow,' he said, 'you and I will go to the smoking-room, and talk about nothing at all subtle. I don't like subtleties either.'

'Ah, but they expect great things of you,' said Chesterford ruefully. 'Dodo was saying you were an apostle. Are you an apostle, Jack?'

'Oh, that's only a nickname of Dodo's,' he said, smiling. 'But who are these dreadfully clever people?'

'Oh, there's Ledgers, you know him, I suppose, and a Miss Edith Staines, and a girl whom I don't know, called Miss Grantham, whom Ledgers said, when she was out of the room last night, that he had "discovered."

What he meant Heaven knows. Then there's Maud, who is a nice girl. She went round to the keeper's with me this afternoon, and played with the baby. Then there's Bertie Arbuthnot, and I think that's all.'

Jack laughed.

'I don't think we need mind them,' he said. 'We'll form a square to resist cavalry.'

'Bertie's the best of the lot,' said Chesterford, 'and they laugh at him rather, I think. But he is quite unconscious of it.'

They drove on in silence a little way. Then Chesterford said,—

'Jack, Dodo makes me the happiest of men. I am afraid sometimes that she is too clever, and wishes I was more so, but it makes no difference. Last night, as I was in the smoking-room she sent to say she wanted to see me, and I went up. She said that she wanted to talk to me, now she had got rid of all those tiresome people, and said so many charming things that I got quite conceited, and had to stop her. I often wonder, Jack, what I have done to deserve her. And she went on talking about our yachting, and those months in London when we were first engaged, and she told

me to go on smoking, and she would have a cigarette too. And we sat on talking, till I saw she was tired, and then I went away, though she would hardly let me.'

This communication had only the effect of making Jack rather uncomfortable. Knowing what he did, he knew that this was not all genuine on Dodo's part. It was obviously an effort to keep it up, to use a vulgar term. And since it was not all genuine, the doubt occurred as to whether any of it was. Jack had a profound belief in Dodo's dramatic talents. That the need for keeping it up had appeared already was an alarming symptom, but the real tragedy would begin on that day when Dodo first failed to do so. And from that moment Jack regarded his prophecy as certain to be fulfilled. The overture had begun, and in course of time the curtain would rise on a grim performance.

They drove up to the door, and entered the large oak-panelled hall, hung all round with portraits of the family. The night was cold, and there was a fire sparkling in the wide, open grate. As they entered, an old collie, who was enjoying the fruits of a well-spent life on the hearthrug,

stretched his great, tawny limbs, and shoved a welcoming nose into Chesterford's hand. This produced heart-burnings of the keenest order in the mind of a small fox-terrier pup, who consisted mainly of head and legs, which latter he evidently considered at present more as a preventive towards walking, than an aid. Being unable to reach his hand the puppy contented himself with sprawling over his boots and making vague snaps at the collie. It was characteristic of Chesterford that all animals liked him. He had a tender regard for the feelings of anything that was dependent on him. Dodo thought this almost inexplicable. She disliked to see animals in pain, because they usually howled, but the dumb anguish of a dog who considers himself neglected, conveyed nothing to her. From within a door to the right, came sounds of talking and laughter.

There was something pathetic in the sight of this beautiful home, and its owner standing with his back to the fire, as Jack divested himself of his coat. Chesterford was so completely happy, so terribly unconscious of what Jack felt sure was going on. He looked the model of the typical English gentle-

man, with his tall stature and well-bred face. Jack remembered passing on the road a labourer who was turning into his cottage. The firelight had thrown a bright ray across the snow-covered road, and inside he had caught a momentary glimpse of the wife with a baby in her arms, and a couple of girls laying the table-cloth. He remembered afresh Dodo's remark about waiting until the chimney smoked, and devoutly hoped that the chimney of this well-appointed house was in good order.

Chesterford led the way to the drawing-room door, and pushed it open for Jack to enter. Dodo was sitting at the tea-table, talking to some half-dozen people who were grouped round her.

As Jack entered, she rose and came towards him with a smile of welcome.

'Ah, Jack,' she said, 'this is delightful; I am tremendously glad to see you! Let's see, whom do you know? May I introduce you to Miss Grantham? Mr Broxton. I think you know everybody else. Chesterford, come here and sit by me at once. You've been an age away. I expect you've been getting into mischief.' She wheeled a chair up for

him, and planted him down in it. He looked radiantly happy.

'Now, Jack,' she went on, 'tell us what you've been doing all these months. It's years since we saw you. I think you look all right. No signs of breaking down yet. I hoped you would have gone into a rapid consumption, because I was married, but it doesn't seem to have made any difference to anybody except Chesterford and me. Jack, don't you think I shall make an excellent matron? I shall get Maud to teach me some of her crochet-stitches. Have you ever been here before? Chesterford, you shut it up, didn't you, for several years, until you thought of bringing me here? Sugar, Jack? Two lumps? Chesterford, you mustn't eat sugar, you're getting quite fat already, You must obey me, you know. You promised to love, honour and obey. Oh, no; I did that. However, sugar is bad for you.'

'Dodo keeps a tight hand on me you see,' said Chesterford, from the depths of his chair. 'Dodo, give me the sugar, or we shall quarrel.'

Dodo laughed charmingly.

'He would quarrel with his own wife for a lump of

sugar,' said Dodo dramatically ; 'but she won't quarrel with him. Take it then!'

She glanced at Jack for a moment as she said this, but Jack was talking to Miss Grantham, and either did not see, or did not seem to. Jack had a pleasant impression of light hair, dark grey eyes and a very fair complexion. But somehow it produced no more effect on him, than do those classical profiles which are commoner on the lids of chocolate boxes than elsewhere. Her 'discoverer' was sitting in a chair next her, talking to her with something of the air of a showman exhibiting the tricks of his performing bear. His manner seemed to say, 'See what an intelligent animal.' The full sublimity of Lord Ledgers' remark had not struck him till that moment.

Miss Grantham was delivering herself of a variety of opinions in a high, penetrating voice.

'Oh, did you never hear him sing last year?' she was saying to Lord Ledgers. 'Mr Broxton, you must have heard him. He has the most lovely voice. He simply sings into your inside. You feel as if someone had got hold of your heart, and was stroking it. Don't you know how some sounds produce that effect? I went with Dodo once. She simply wept

floods, but I was too far gone for that. He had put a little stopper on my tear-bottle, and though I was dying to cry, I couldn't.'

'I always wonder how sorry we are when we cry,' said Lord Ledgers in a smooth, low voice. 'It always strikes me that the people who don't cry probably feel most.'

'Oh, you are a horrid, unfeeling monster,' remarked Miss Grantham; 'that's what comes of being a man. Just because you are not in the habit of crying yourself, you think that you have all the emotions, but stoically repress them. Now I cultivate emotions. I would walk ten miles any day in order to have an emotion. Wouldn't you, Mr Broxton?'

'It obviously depends on what sort of emotion I should find when I walked there,' said Jack. 'There are some emotions that I would walk further to avoid.'

'Oh, of course, the common emotions, "the litany things," as Dodo calls them,' said Miss Grantham, dismissing them lightly with a wave of her hand. 'But what I like is a nice, little, sad emotion that makes you feel so melancholy you don't know what to do with yourself. I don't mean deaths and that sort of thing, but seeing someone you love being

dreadfully unhappy and extremely prosperous at the same time.'

'But it's rather expensive for the people you love,' said Jack.

'Oh, we must all make sacrifices,' said Miss Grantham. 'It's quite worth while if you gratify your friends. I would not mind being acutely unhappy, if I could dissect my own emotions and have them photographed and sent round to my friends.'

'What a charming album we might all make,' said Lord Ledgers. 'Page 1. Miss Grantham's heart in the acute stage. Page 2. Mortification setting in. Page 3. The lachrymatory gland permanently closed by a tenor voice.'

'Poor old Chesterford,' thought Jack, 'this is rather hard on him.'

But Chesterford was not to be pitied just now. Dodo was devoting her exclusive conversation to him in defiance of her duties as hostess. She was recounting to him how she had spent every moment of his absence at the station. Certainly she was keeping it up magnificently at present.

'And Mrs Vivian comes to-morrow,' she was just saying. 'You like her, don't you, Chesterford? You

must be awfully good to her, and take her to see all the drunken idlers in the village. That will be dear of you. It's just what she likes. She has a sort of passion for drunken cabmen, who stamp on their wives. If you stamped on me a little every evening, she would cultivate you to any extent. Shall I lie down on the floor for you to begin?'

Chesterford leant back in his chair in a kind of ecstasy.

'Ah, Dodo,' he said, 'you are wonderfully good to me. But I must go and write two notes before dinner; and you must amuse your guests. I am very glad Jack has come. He is a very good chap. But don't make him an apostle.'

Dodo laughed.

'I shall make a little golden hoop for him like the apostles in the Arundels, and another for you, and when nobody else is there, you can take them off, and play hoops with them. I expect the apostles did that when they went for a walk. You couldn't wear it round a hat, could you?'

Miss Grantham instantly annexed Dodo.

'Dodo,' she said, 'come and take my part.

These gentlemen say that you shouldn't cultivate emotions.'

'No, not that quite,' corrected Jack. 'I said it was expensive for your friends if they had to make themselves miserable, in order to afford food for your emotions.'

'Now, isn't that selfish?' said Miss Grantham, with the air of a martyr at the stake. 'Here am I ready to be drawn and quartered for anyone's amusement, and you tell me you are sorry for your part, but that it costs too much. Maud, come off that sofa, and take up the daggers for a too unselfish woman.'

'I expect I don't know much about these things,' said Maud.

'No; Maud would not go further than wrapping herself in a winding-sheet of blue worsted,' remarked Dodo incisively.

Maud flushed a little.

'Oh, Dodo!' she exclaimed deprecatingly.

'It's no use hitting Maud,' said Dodo pensively. 'You might as well hit a feather bed. Now, if you hit Jack, he will hit back.'

'Well, I'd prefer you hit me,' said Jack, 'than

that you should hit anyone who can't hit back.'

'Can't you see that I have determined not to hit feather beds,' said Dodo in a low tone. 'Really, Jack, you do me an injustice.'

Jack looked up at her quickly.

'Do you say that already?' he asked.

'Oh, if you are going to whisper, I shall whisper too,' remarked Miss Grantham calmly. 'Lord Ledgers, I want to tell you a secret.'

'I was only telling Jack he was stupid,' said Dodo. 'I thought I would spare him before you all, but I see I have to explain. Have you seen Bertie yet, Jack? He's in the smoking-room, I think. Edith Staines is probably there too. She always smokes after tea, and Chesterford doesn't like it in the drawing-room. You know her, don't you? She's writing a symphony or something, and she's no use except at meal-times. I expect she will play it us afterwards. We must make Bertie sing too. There's the dressing-bell. I'm going to be gorgeous to-night in honour of you, Jack.'

Jack found himself making a quantity of reflections, when he retired to his room that night. He

became aware that he had enjoyed himself more that evening, than he had done for a very long time. He questioned himself as to when he had enjoyed himself so much, and he was distinctly perturbed to find that the answer was, when he had last spent an evening with Dodo. He had formed an excellent habit of being exactingly honest with himself, and he concluded that Dodo's presence had been the cause of it. It was a very unpleasant blow to him. He had accepted her refusal with an honest determination to get over it. He had not moped, nor pined, nor striven, nor cried. He had no intentions of dying of a broken heart, but the stubborn fact remained that Dodo exercised an unpleasantly strong influence over him. He could have repeated without effort all she had said that night. She had not said anything particularly remarkable, but somehow he felt that the most striking utterances of other men and women would have not produced any such effect on him. It really was very inconvenient. Dodo had married a man who adored her, for whom she did not care two pins' heads, and this man was one of his oldest friends. Decidedly

there was something left-handed about this particular disposition of destiny. And the worst of it was that Chesterford was being hopelessly duped. About that he felt no doubt. Dodo's acting was so remarkably life-like, that he mistook it at present for reality. But the play must end sometime, and the sequel was too dark and involved to be lightly followed out. He could not conceive why this elaborate drama on Dodo's part did not disgust him more. He wished he had been deceived by it himself, but having been behind the scenes, he had seen Dodo, as it were, in the green-room, putting on the rouge and powder. But failing that, he wished that a wholesome impulse of disgust and contempt had superseded his previous feelings with regard to her. But he believed with her that under the circumstances it was the best thing to do. The marriage was a grand mistake, true, but given that, was not this simply so many weeks of unhappiness saved? Then he had an immense pity for Dodo's original mistake. She had told him once that she was no more responsible for her philosophy than for the fact that she happened to be five foot eight in height, and had black eyes and black hair. 'It was Nature's doing,'

she had said; 'go and quarrel with her, but don't blame me. If I had made myself, I should have given myself a high ideal; I should have had something to live up to. Now, I have no ideal. The whole system of things seems to me such an immense puzzle, that I have given up trying to find a solution. I know what I like, and what I dislike. Can you blame me for choosing the one, and avoiding the other? I like wealth and success, and society and admiration. In a degree I have secured them, and the more I secure them the more reason I have to be satisfied. To do otherwise would be like putting on boots that were too large for me —they are excellent for other people, but not for me. I cannot accept ideals that I don't feel. I can understand them, and I can sympathise with them, and I can and do wish they were mine; but, as Nature has denied me them, I must make the best of what I have.'

Jack felt hopeless against this kind of reasoning, and angry with himself for letting this woman have such dominion over him. In a measure he felt himself capable of views bounded by a horizon not so selfishly fatalistic, and the idea of the

smoking chimney in the cottage did not seem to matter, provided that Dodo was sitting on the other side of the hearthrug. He would willingly have sacrificed anything else, to allow himself to give full reins to his thought on this point. But the grand barrier which stood between him and Dodo, was not so much her refusal of him, but the existence of her husband. At this Jack pulled himself up sharp. There are certain feelings of loyalty, that still rank above all other emotions. Miss Grantham would certainly have classed such among the litany things. There was nothing heroic about it. It simply consisted in a sturdy refusal to transgress, even in vaguest thought, a code which deals with the most ordinary and commonplace virtues and vices. There is nothing heroic in a street boy passing by the baker's cart without a grab at the loaves, and it sounds almost puritanical to forbid him to cast a glance at them, or inhale a sniff of their warm fragrance. 'Certainly this side of morality is remarkably dull,' thought Jack; and the worst of it is, that it is not only dull but difficult. With practice most of us could become a Simeon Stylites, provided we are gifted

with a steady head, and a constitution that defies showers. It is these commonplace acts of loyalty, the ordinary and rational demands of friendship and society, that are so dreadfully taxing to most of us who have the misfortune not to be born saints. Then Jack began to feel ill-used. 'Why the deuce should Chesterford be born a marquis and not I? What has he done to have a title and a fortune and Dodo that I have been given the chance to do?' It struck him that his reflections were deplorably commonplace, and that his position ought to be made much more of. He wondered whether this sort of situation was always so flat. In novels there is always a touch of the heroic in the faithful friend who is loyal to his cousin, and steadily avoids his cousin's wife; but here he was in identically the same situation, feeling not at all heroic, but only discontented and quarrelsome with this ill-managed world. Decidedly he would go to bed.

Owing to a certain habit that he had formed early in life he slept soundly, and morning found him not only alive, but remarkably well and hearty, and with a certain eagerness to follow up what

he had thought out on the previous night. He was in an excellently-managed household, which imposed no rules on its inhabitants except that they should do what they felt most inclined to do; he was in congenial company, and his digestion was good. It is distressing how important those material matters are to us. The deeper emotions do but form a kind of background to our coarser needs. We come down in the morning feeling rather miserable, but we eat an excellent breakfast and, in spite of ourselves, we are obliged to confess that we feel distinctly better.

As Jack crossed the hall, he met a footman carrying a breakfast-tray into the drawing-room. The door was half open, and there came from within the sounds of vigorous piano-playing, and now and then a bar or two of music sung in a rich, alto voice. These tokens seemed to indicate that Miss Edith Staines was taking her breakfast at the piano. Jack found himself smiling at the thought; it was a great treat to find anyone so uniformly in character as Miss Staines evidently was. He turned into the dining-room, where he found Miss Grantham sitting at the table alone.

Dodo was lolling in a great chair by the fire, and there were signs that Lord Chesterford had already breakfasted. Dodo was nursing a little Persian kitten with immense tenderness. Apparently she had been disagreeing with Miss Grantham on some point, and had made the kitten into a sort of arbitrator.

'Oh, you dear kitten,' she was saying, 'you must agree with me, if you think it over. Now, supposing you were very fond of a tom-cat that had only the woodshed to lie in, and another very presentable tom belonging to the Queen came—Ah, Jack, here you are. Chesterford's breakfasted, and there's going to be a shoot to-day over the home covers. Edith is composing and breakfasting. She says she has an idea. So Grantie and I are going to bring you lunch to the keeper's cottage at half-past one.'

'And Bertie?' asked Jack.

'Oh, you must get Edith to tell you what Bertie's going to do. Perhaps she'll want him to turn over the pages for her, or give her spoonfuls of egg and bacon, while she does her music. He's in the drawing-room now. Edith's appropriated

him. She usually does appropriate somebody. We told Chesterford to get Bertie to come if possible, but Edith's leave is necessary. Maud is going to meet Mrs Vivian, who comes this afternoon, and, as she has some shopping to do, she will lunch in Harchester, and drive out afterwards; Ledgers has had a telegram, and has made a blasphemous departure for town. He comes back this evening.'

'Well, Dodo,' remarked Miss Grantham, 'now let's go on with what we were discussing. Mr Broxton will make a much better umpire than that kitten.'

'Oh, shut up, Grantie,' said Dodo, with fine candour, 'Jack agrees with neither of us.'

'Tell me what it is,' said Jack, 'and then I'll promise to agree with somebody.'

'I don't care about your agreeing with me,' said Miss Grantham. 'I know I'm right, so it doesn't signify what anybody else thinks.'

Miss Grantham, it may be noticed, showed some signs of being ruffled.

'Oh, now, Grantie's angry,' said Dodo. 'Grantie, do be amiable. Call her Grantie, Jack,' she added with feeling.

'Dodo, darling,' said Miss Grantham, 'you're really foolish now and then. I'm perfectly amiable. But, you know, if you don't care for a man at all, and he does care for you a great deal, it's sure to be a failure. I can't think of any instance just now, but I know I'm right.'

Dodo looked up and caught Jack's eye for a moment. Then she turned to Miss Grantham.

'Dear Grantie, please shut up. It's no use trying to convince me. I know a case in point just the other way, but I am not at liberty to mention it. Am I, Jack?'

'If you mean the same as the case I'm thinking of, certainly not,' said Jack.

'Well, I'm sure this is very pleasant for me,' said Miss Grantham, in high, cool tones.

At this moment a shrill voice called Dodo from the drawing-room.

'Dodo, Dodo,' it cried, 'the man's brought me two tepid poached eggs! Do send me something else. Is there such a thing as a grilled bone?'

These remarks were speedily followed up by the appearance of Miss Staines at the dining-room door. In one hand she held the despised eggs,

in the other a half-finished score. Behind her followed a footman with her breakfast-tray, in excusable ignorance as to what was required of him.

'Dear Dodo,' she went on, 'you know when I'm composing a symphony I want something more exciting than two poached eggs. Mr Broxton, I know, will take my side. You couldn't eat poached eggs at a ball—could you? They might do very well for a funeral march or a nocturne, but they won't do for a symphony, especially for the scherzo. A brandy-and-soda and a grilled bone is what one really wants for a scherzo, only that would be quite out of the question.'

Edith Staines talked in a loud, determined voice, and emphasised her points with little dashes and flourishes of the dish of poached eggs. At this moment one of them flew on to the floor and exploded. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and at any rate this relieved the footman from his state of indecision. His immediate mission was clearly to remove it.

Dodo threw herself back in her chair with a peal of laughter.

'Go on, go on,' she cried, 'you are too splendid. Tell us what you write the presto on.'

'I can't waste another moment,' said Edith. 'I'm in the middle of the most entrancing motif, which is working out beautifully. Do you mind my smoking in the drawing-room? I am awfully sorry, but it makes all the difference to my work. Burn a little incense there afterwards. Do send me a bone, Dodo. Come and hear me play the scherzo later on. It's the best thing I've ever done. Oh, by the way, I telegraphed to Herr Truffen to come to-morrow—he's my conductor, you know. You can put him up in the village or the coal-hole, if you like. He's quite happy if he gets enough beer. He's my German conductor, you know. I made him entirely. I took him to the Princess the other day when I was at Aix, and we all had beer together in the verandah of the Beau Site. You'll be amused with him.'

'Oh, rather,' said Dodo; 'that will be all right. He can sleep in the house. Will he come early to-morrow? Let's see—to-morrow's Sunday. Edith, I've got an idea. We'll have a dear little service in the house—we can't go to church if it snows—

and you shall play your mass, and Herr What's-his-name shall conduct, and Bertie, and Grantie, and you and I will sing. Won't it be lovely? You and I will settle all that this afternoon. Telegraph to Truffler, or whatever his name is, to come by the eight-twenty. Then he'll be here by twelve, and we'll have the service at a quarter past.'

'Dodo, that will be grand,' said Edith. 'I can't wait now. Good-bye. Hurry up my breakfast—I'm awfully sharp-set.'

Edith went back to the drawing-room, whistling in a particularly shrill manner.

'Oh, did you ever!' said Dodo, who was laughing feebly in her chair. 'Edith really is splendid. She is so dreadfully sure of herself, and she tells you so. And she does talk so loud—it goes right through your head like a chirping canary. Chesterford can't bear her.'

Jack laughed.

'She was giving him advice about the management of his kennels at dinner last night,' he said. 'I heard her say to him impressively, as she left the room, "Try brimstone." It took Chesterford

at least five minutes to recover. He was dreadfully depressed.'

'He must take Mrs Vivian in to-night,' said Dodo. 'You'll hear them talking about slums, and overcrowding, and marriage among minors, and the best cure for dipsomaniacs. The other night they were talking about someone called "Charlie," affectionately but gravely, and I supposed they meant your brother, Jack, but it was the second laundress's young man. Oh, they shook their heads over him.'

'I don't think common people are at all interesting,' said Miss Grantham. 'They only think about things to eat, and heaven, and three acres, and funerals.'

She had by this time finished her breakfast, and stood warming her back in a gentlemanly manner by the fire.

The door opened and Lord Chesterford came in.

'Morning, Jack,' he said, 'what a lazy chap you are. It's half-past ten, and you're still breakfasting. Dodo, what a beastly smell of smoke.'

'Oh, it's Edith,' remarked Dodo. 'You mustn't

mind her, dear. You know she's doing a symphony, and she has to smoke to keep the inspiration going. Dear old boy, you are so sweet about these things; you've never made a fuss since I knew you first. You look very nice this morning. I wish I could dress in a homespun Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers. Grantie and I are going to bring you lunch. What should you like? You'd better have some champagne. Don't step in that egg, dear; it will make your nice, brown boots all beastly. It's awfully cold. You'd better have two bottles. Tell Raikes to send you two. Chesterford, I wish you'd tell Raikes to cut off the end of his nose. I'm always afraid he'll hit me with it when he hands things. He might have it grafted into his chin, you know; he hasn't got any chin. Jack, have you finished? Yes, you'd better start. We'll meet you at the bothy. I'll go and ask Edith if she can spare Bertie.'

'What does she want Bertie for?' said Chesterford.

'Oh, I expect she'll let him come,' remarked Dodo; 'she's really busy this morning. She's been composing since a quarter past eight.'

Dodo went across the hall and opened the drawing-room door. Edith was completely absorbed in her work. The grilled bone lay untouched on a small table by the piano. Bertie was sitting before the fire.

'Bertie,' said Dodo, 'are you coming shooting?'

This woke Edith up.

'Oh, it's splendid,' she said. 'Dodo, listen to this.'

She ran her hands over the piano, and then broke out into a quick, rippling scherzo. The music flew on, as if all the winds of heaven were blowing it; then it slowed down, halted a moment, and repeated itself till Dodo burst out: 'Oh, Edith, it's lovely! I want to dance.' She wheeled a table out of the way, kicked a chair across the room, and began turning and twisting with breathless rapidity. Her graceful figure looked admirable in the quick movements of her impromptu dance. Bertie thought he had never seen anything so deliciously fresh. Dodo danced with peculiar abandon. Every inch of her moved in perfect time and harmony to the music.

She had caught up a thin, Indian shawl from

one of the sofas, and passed it behind her back, round her head, this way and that, bending, till at one moment it swept the ground in front of her, and at another flew in beautiful curves high above her head, till at last the music stopped, and she threw herself down exhausted in an arm-chair.

'Oh, that was glorious,' she panted. 'Edith, you are a genius. I never felt like that before. I didn't dance at all, it was the music that danced, and pulled me along with it.'

'That was the best compliment my music has ever received,' said Edith. 'That scherzo was meant to make you want to dance. Now, Dodo, could I have done that after eating two poached eggs?'

'You may have grilled bones seven times a day,' said Dodo, 'if you'll compose another scherzo.'

'I wanted a name for the symphony,' said Edith, 'and I shall call it the "Dodo." That's a great honour, Dodo. Now, if you only feel miserable during the "Andante," I shall be satisfied. But you came about something else, I forget what.'

'Oh, about Bertie. Is he coming shooting?'

'I wish it was right for women to shoot,' said Edith. 'I do shoot when I'm at home, and there's

no one there. Anyhow I couldn't to-day. I must finish this. Dodo, if you are going to take lunch to them, I'll come with you, if you don't go too early. You know this music makes me perfectly wild, but it can't be done on poached eggs. Now set me down at the Handel Festival, and I'll be content with high tea, cold meat and muffins, you know. Handel always reminds me of high tea, particularly the muffins. He must have written the "Messiah" between tea and dinner on Sunday evening, after an afternoon service in summer. I've often thought of taking the Salvation Army hymn-book and working the lines up into fugual choruses, and publishing them as a lost work of Handel's, Noah, or Zebedee's children, or the Five Foolish Virgins. I don't believe anyone would know the difference.'

Dodo was turning over the leaves of Edith's score book.

'I give it up,' she said at last; 'you are such a jumble of opposites. You sit down and write a Sanctus, which makes one feel as if one wants to be a Roman Catholic archbishop, and all the time you are smoking cigarettes and eating grilled bone.'

'Oh, everyone's a jumble of opposites,' said Edith, 'when you come to look at them. It's only because my opposites are superficial, that you notice them. A Sanctus is only a form of expression for thoughts which everyone has, even though their tastes appear to lie in the music-hall line; and music is an intelligible way of expressing those thoughts. Most people are born dumb with regard to their emotions, and you therefore conclude that they haven't got any, or that they are expressed by their ordinary actions.'

'No, it's not that,' said Dodo. 'What I mean is that your Sanctus emphasises an emotion I should think you felt very little.'

'I!' said Edith with surprise. 'My dear Dodo, you surely know me better than that. Just because I don't believe that grilled bones are necessarily inconsistent with deep religious feeling, you assume that I haven't got the feeling.'

Dodo laughed.

'I suppose one associates the champions of religion with proselytising,' she said. 'You don't proselytise, you know.'

'No artist does,' said Edith; 'it's their business

to produce—to give the world an opportunity of forming conclusions, not to preach their own conclusions to the world.'

'Yes; but your music is the expression of your conclusions, isn't it?'

'Yes; but I don't argue about it, and try to convert the world to it. If someone says to me, "I don't know what you mean! Handel seems to me infinitely more satisfactory," I can understand him, I simply say, "For Heaven's sake, then, why don't you go to hear Handel? Why leave a creed that satisfies you?" Music is a conviction, but Handel's music has nothing to do with my convictions, nor mine with Handel's.'

Edith sat down sternly, and buried herself in her convictions.

CHAPTER V.

IT was a perfect winter's day, and when, two hours afterwards, Dodo and the others drove off to meet the shooting-party, the grass in the shadow was still crisp with the light, hoar frost, but where the sun had touched it, the fields were covered with a moist radiance. It had just begun to melt the little pieces of ice that hung from the bare, pendulous twigs of the birch-trees, and send them shivering to the ground. Through the brown bracken you could hear the startled scuttle of the rabbit, or the quick tapping of a pheasant, who had realised that schemes were on foot against him. A night of hard frost had turned the wheel-ruts into little waves and billows of frozen mud, which the carriage wheels levelled as they passed over them.

They caught up the shooting-party shortly before lunch, and, as it was cold, Edith and Dodo got out, leaving Miss Grantham, who preferred

being cold to walking under any circumstances, to gather up the extra rugs round her.

'See that there's a good fire, Grantie,' called Dodo after her, 'and tell them to have the champagne opened.'

The sight of abundant game was too much for Edith, and, as Lord Chesterford fell out of line to join Dodo, she asked him if she might have a couple of shots.

The keeper's face expressed some reasonable surprise when he observed Edith snapping the cartridges into her gun with a practised hand. His previous views with regard to women in connection with guns were based upon the idea that most women screamed, when they saw a gun, and considered it a purely unaccountable weapon, which might go off without the least encouragement or warning, and devastate the country for miles round. He was still more surprised when he saw her pick off a couple of pheasants with precision and deadliness of aim. She gave her gun back to Lord Chesterford as they neared the lodge, and volunteered to join them after lunch for an hour, if they didn't mind.

Chesterford stole an appealing glance at Dodo, who, however, only gave him a half-amused, half-pitying look, and nodded assent.

'The worst of it is,' said Edith, 'I care for such lots of things. There's my music, and then there's any sort of game—have you ever seen me play tennis?—and there isn't time for everything. I am a musician, and a good shot, and an excellent rider, and a woman, and heaps of other things. It isn't conceit when I say so—I simply know it.'

Dodo laughed.

'Well, you know, Edith, you're not modest. Your worst enemies don't accuse you of that. I don't mean to say that I am, for that matter. Did you ever play the game of marking people for beauty, and modesty, and cleverness, and so on? We played it here the night before you came, and you didn't get a single mark from anybody for modesty. I only got eleven, and five of those were from Chesterford, and six from myself. But I don't believe your husband will ever give you five. You see, Bertie didn't give you any, if you're thinking of marrying him.'

'Oh, I'm not going to marry anybody,' said

Edith. 'You know I get frightfully attached to someone about three times a week, and after that never think of any of them again. It isn't that I get tired of them, but somebody else turns up, and I want to know him too. There are usually several good points about everyone, and they show those to new acquaintances first; after that, you find something in them you don't like, so the best thing is to try somebody else.'

'Oh, that depends on the people,' said Dodo meditatively. 'Some people wear well, you know, and those improve on acquaintance. Now I don't. The first time a man sees me, he usually thinks I'm charming, and sympathetic, and lively. Well, so I am, to do myself justice. That remains all through. But it turns out that I've got a bad temper, that I smoke and swear, and only amuse myself. Then they begin to think they rated me too high at first, and if they happen to be people who wear well themselves, it is just then that you begin to like them, which is annoying. So one goes on, disgusting the people one wants to like, and pleasing people whom one doesn't like at all. It's fate, I suppose.'

Dodo plucked a piece of dead bracken, and pulled it to bits with a somewhat serious air.

'You oughtn't to complain, Dodo,' said Edith. 'You're married to a man who, I am sure, wears well, as you call it, though it's a dreadfully coarse expression, and he doesn't seem to get tired of you. I always wonder whether it's really worth while trotting oneself out or analysing one's nature in this way. I don't think it is. It makes one feel small and stupid.'

'Ah, but it's better to do it yourself, than to feel that other people think you small and stupid,' said Dodo. 'That's disagreeable if you like. Wait till Mrs Vivian comes, and she'll do it for you. She's the only person who makes me feel really cheap — about three halfpence a dozen, including the box.'

'Oh, but she won't make me feel small,' said Edith coolly, 'because I'm not small really. It's only myself that makes me feel small.'

'I don't think I should call you morbidly modest,' said Dodo. 'But here's the keeper's cottage. I'm awfully hungry. I hope they've brought some

pâté. Don't you like *pâté?* Of course one's very sorry for the poor, diseased goose with a bad inside, but there are so many other things to think about besides diseased geese, that it doesn't signify much. Come on, Chesterford, they can count the dead things afterwards. Grantie's waiting. Jack, pick up that pheasant by you. Have you shot well? Look at the sun through those fir-trees—isn't it lovely? Edith, why aren't we two nice, little simple painters who could sit down, and be happy to paint that, instead of turning ourselves inside out? But, after all, you know, one is much more interesting than anybody or anything else, at least I am. Aren't you? What a blessing it is one didn't happen to be born a fool!'

Dodo was sitting alone late in the afternoon. The shooting-party had come back, and dispersed to their rooms to wash and dress. 'You all look remarkably dirty and funny,' Dodo had said when they came in, 'and you had better have tea sent up to you. Does shooting bring on the inspiration, Edith? Take a bath.'

Edith had gone up to her room, after insisting

on having two of Dodo's bottles of eau-de-cologne in her hot bath. 'There is nothing so refreshing,' she said, 'and you come out feeling like a goddess.' Certainly Edith looked anything like a goddess just now. Her hat was pushed rakishly on to the side of her head, there was a suggestion of missing hair-pins about her hair; she wafted with her about the room a fine odour of tobacco and gunpowder; she had burned her dress with a fusee head that had fallen off; her boots were large and unlaced, and curiously dirty, and her hands were black with smoke and oil, and had a sort of trimming in the way of small feathers and little patches of blood. Decidedly, if she came out feeling or looking like a goddess, the prescription ought to want no more convincing testimonial. But she insisted she had never enjoyed herself so much, she talked, and screamed, and laughed as if nothing serious had occurred since breakfast. As Dodo sat in the drawing-room, opening a few letters and skipping all except the shortest paragraphs in the *Times*, she heard the noise of wheels outside, and hurried into the hall to meet Mrs Vivian. Somehow she

looked forward to Mrs Vivian's coming with a good deal of pleasure and interest. She was aware that another strain in the house might be advisable. Bertie and Jack, and Miss Grantham and Edith, were all somewhat on the same lines. Personally she very much preferred those lines; and it was chiefly for her husband's sake, that she wanted the new arrival. Lord Chesterford had done his duty nobly, but Dodo's observant eye saw how great an effort it was to him; at lunch he had been silent, at tea even more so. Dodo acknowledged that Edith had relieved the party from any sense of the necessity of supporting conversation, but it was obvious to her that Chesterford was hopelessly out of his element, and she felt a keen desire to please him. She had sat by him after lunch, as they smoked and talked, before resuming the shooting, and Dodo had patted his hand and called him a 'dear old darling' when nobody happened to be listening, but she had a distinct sense of effort all day in attending to him, and enjoying the company of the others as much as she wished. There was certainly a want of bal-

ance in the party, and Mrs Vivian's weight would tend to keep things even. Dodo had even aroused herself to a spasmodic interest in the new curate, but Lord Chesterford had exhibited such unmistakable surprise at this new departure, that she at once fell back on the easier and simpler expedient of blowing smoke rings at him, and drinking out of the same glass by mistake.

Mrs Vivian was extremely gracious, and apparently very much pleased to see Dodo. She kissed her on both cheeks, and shook both her hands, and said what a pleasant drive she had had with dear Maud, and she hoped Lord Chesterford was as well and happy as Dodo appeared to be, and they both deserved to be.

'And you must have a great talk with me, Dodo,' she said, 'and tell me all about your honeymoon.'

Dodo was pleased and rather flattered. Apparently Mrs Vivian had left off thinking she was very small. Anyhow, it was a good thing to have her. Lord Chesterford would be pleased to see her, and he was building some charming almshouses for old women, who appeared to Dodo to

be supremely uninteresting and very ugly. Dodo had a deep-rooted dislike of ugly things, unless they amused her very much. She could not bear babies. Babies had no profile, which seemed to her a very lamentable deficiency, and they were not nearly so nice to play with as kittens, and they always howled, unless they were eating or sleeping. But Mrs Vivian seemed to revel in ugly things. She was always talking to drunken cabmen, or workhouse people, or dirty little boys who played in the gutter. Dodo's cometic interest in the East End had been entirely due to her. That lady had a masterly and efficient way of managing, that won Dodo's immediate admiration, and had overcome for the moment her distaste for the necessary ugliness. Anything masterly always found a sympathetic audience in Dodo. Success was of such paramount importance in her eyes, that even a successful organiser of days in the country for match-girls was to be admired, and even copied, provided the other circumstances of success were not too expensive.

Mrs Vivian was a complete and immediate success on this occasion. Dodo made a quantity of

mental notes on the best way to behave, when you have the misfortune to become middle-aged and rather plain. Everyone who already knew her seemed to consider her arrival as the last drop in their cup of happiness. Lord Chesterford, on entering the room, had said, 'My dear Mrs Vivian, this is too delightful of you. We are all charmed to see you,' and he had sat down by her, and quite seemed to forget that Dodo was sitting on the other side of the fire. Jack also had, so to speak, flown into her arms. Dodo immediately resolved to make a friend of her; a person who could be as popular among the aristocracy, as she was among cabmen was distinctly a person to cultivate. She decidedly wanted the receipt.

'It is so good of you, Dodo, to ask me like this,' said Mrs Vivian, when Dodo went and sat by her. 'It always seems to me a great compliment to ask people quietly to your house when only a few friends are there. If you have a great houseful of people, it does not matter much whom you ask, but I mean to take this as a sign that you consider me an old friend.'

Dodo was always quick at seeing what was required of her.

'Of course I do,' she answered. 'Who are my old friends if you are not?'

'That is so nice of you,' said Mrs Vivian. 'I want to have a long talk with you, and learn all about you. I am going to stay with your mother next week, and she will never forgive me unless I give a full and satisfactory account of you. Satisfactory it cannot help being.' She looked across at Lord Chesterford, who was talking to Miss Grantham, and laughing politely at her apostolic jokes. 'Oh, Dodo, you ought to be very happy!'

Dodo felt that this was rather like the ten minutes before dinner. She had a vague idea of telling Chesterford to sound the gong, but she was skilled at glances with meaning, and she resorted to this method.

'Lord Chesterford tells me you have Miss Staines with you,' continued Mrs Vivian. 'I am so anxious to meet her. She has a wonderful gift for music, I hear.'

At this moment the sound of hurrying feet was

heard in the hall. The drawing-room door flew open and Edith entered. Dodo laughed inwardly and hopelessly. Edith began to talk at the top of her voice, before she was fairly inside the room.

'Dodo, Dodo,' she screamed, 'we must settle about the service at once. I have heard from Herr Truffen, and he will be here by twelve; and we must have everything ready, and we'd better do my Mass in G flat; on the whole it's the easiest. I suppose you couldn't hire four or five French horns in the village. If you could we might do the one in A; but we must have them for the Gloria. We must have a practice to-night. Have you got any musical footmen or housemaids?'

'Mrs Vivian, Miss Edith Staines,' remarked Dodo sweetly.

There was a moment's silence, and then Dodo broke down.

'Oh, Edith, you are a good chap; isn't she, Mrs Vivian? Mrs Vivian was just talking about you, and you came in so opportunely that, until you began talking about masses, I really thought you must be the other thing. Oh, Chesterford, I

haven't told you. We're going to have a delicious little service in the drawing-room to-morrow morning, and we are going to sing a Mass. Grantie can't possibly go to church in this weather, and Jack and Bertie are not as good about it as they might be, so you see it would be really removing the temptation of not going to church, if we have church here, and can you sing, Mrs Vivian? Will you come, Chesterford? You might go to church first, and then come in here afterwards; that will be two services. How dreadfully unbearably conceited you will be all the afternoon. You might read the second lesson for us; no, I think I shall read both. Yes, Edith, I'll come in a few minutes. I don't know of any musical footmen. You might have them up one by one and make them sing scales, and Jack can try the housemaids' voices. I'm awfully glad Herr Truffen is coming. He's a tremendous German swell, Mrs Vivian, and conducts at the Crystal Palace, and St James's, and St Paul's and everywhere.'

'That will be charming,' said Mrs Vivian. 'I shall certainly avail myself of it, Dodo, if I may, only I think I shall go to church first with Lord

Chesterford. He has promised to show me all his schemes for the village. I think Maud means to go too. But if you will let me, I will go to my room, and write a few letters, and then you will be free to practise. It will be a great pleasure to hear your Mass, Miss Staines; I am very fortunate in coming just in time.'

'Really, Dodo,' said Edith, 'you ought to cultivate the musical talents of your establishment. Last winter I was in the Pyrenees, and there was only an old sexton, who was also a charcoal burner, and my maid, and Charlie and his valet and his wife, but we had magnificent music, and a midnight service on New Year's Eve. Charlie took tenor, and Sybil treble, and I alto, and the sexton bass. You have no idea of the trouble it was to get the sexton to learn his part. I had to hunt him up in those little brutal sheds, and thrust the book into his hand, and forbid him to eat chestnuts, and force him to drink porter and Spanish liquorice. Come on; let's begin.'

The practice went off satisfactorily, and Edith expressed herself as pleased. She and Dodo then had a talk to arrange what Dodo called the 'Play-

bill.' Dodo had settled to read the lessons, and wished to make a small selection of prayers, but there Edith had put her foot down.

'No, Dodo,' she said, 'you're taking a wrong idea of it. I don't believe you're serious. Now I am. I want to do this Mass because I believe we can do it well, but I haven't the least confidence in your reading prayers well, or caring at all about them. I am rather in doubt about the lessons, but I suppose we can have those.'

It was distinctly news to Dodo that Edith was serious. For herself she had only wished to have a nice little amusement for Sunday morning, which, in Dodo's experience, was rather a tiresome time if you stopped at home, but on the whole preferable there than at a country church. But Edith was really in earnest whatever she did, whether it was shooting, or music, or playing lawn-tennis. Frivolity was the one charge she could not brook for a moment. Her amusements might, indeed, be frivolous, but she did them with all her heart. So the service was arranged to consist of a lesson, a Mass, and another lesson. The choice of lessons was left to Dodo. Accordingly, next morning

Lord Chesterford and Mrs Vivian drove off with Maud to eleven o'clock church, leaving the others still at breakfast. After that meal was over Dodo announced she was going to get the drawing-room ready.

'We must move all the sofas out of the room, because they don't look religious,' she said; 'and I shall cover up the picture of Venus and Adonis. I have got the sweetest little praying-table upstairs, and a skull. Do you think we'd better have the skull, Edith? I think it makes one feel Sunday-like. I shall put the praying-table in the window, and shall read the lessons from there. Perhaps the skull might frighten old Truffler. I have found two dreadfully nice lessons. I quite forgot the Bible was such a good book. I think I shall go on with it. One of them is about the bones in Ezekiel, which were very dry—you know it—and the other is out of the Revelations. I think—'

'Dodo,' broke in Edith, 'I don't believe you're a bit serious. You think it will be rather amusing, and that's all. If you're not serious I sha'n't come.'

'Dear Edith,' said Dodo demurely, 'I'm perfectly serious. I want it all to be just as nice as it can be. Do you think I should take all the trouble with the praying-table and so on, if I wasn't?'

'You want to make it dramatic,' said Edith decidedly. 'Now, I mean it to be religious. You are rather too dramatic at times, you know, and this isn't an occasion for it. You can be dramatic afterwards, if you like. Herr Truffen is awfully religious. I used to go with him to Roman Catholic services, and once to confession. I nearly became a Roman Catholic.'

'Oh, I should like to be a nice little nun,' said Dodo; 'those black and white dresses are awfully becoming, with a dear trotty rosary, you know, on one side, and a twisty cord round one's waist, and an almsbox. But I must go and arrange the drawing-room. Tell me when your conductor comes. I hope he isn't awfully German. Would he like some beer first? I think the piano is in tune. I suppose he'll play, won't he? Make him play a voluntary, when we come in. I'm afraid we can't have a procession though. That's a pity

Oh, I'm sorry, Edith. I'm really going to be quite serious. I think it will be charming.'

Dodo completed her arrangements in good time, and forbore to make any more frivolous allusions to the service. She was sitting in the drawing-room, regarding her preparations with a satisfied air, when Herr Truffen was announced. Dodo greeted him in the hall as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should be called upon to accompany Edith's Mass.

'We're going to have service directly, if you're ready. We want you to accompany Miss Staines's Mass in G flat, but you mustn't take the Kyrie too quick, if you don't mind. Bertie Arbuthnot's singing tenor, and he's not very quick—are you, Bertie? Oh, by the way, this is Bertie. His other name is Mr Arbuthnot.'

Herr Truffen was most gratified by so charming an arrangement, and so great a musical treat. When Edith came down she greeted him effusively.

'My dear Professor, this is delightful,' she said. 'It's quite like old times, isn't it? We're going to do the Mass in G flat. I wanted the one in A,

only there are no French horns in the village —isn't that benighted? And would you believe it, Lady Chesterford has positively got not one musical footman.'

Herr Truffen was a large, spectacled German, who made everyone else look unnecessarily undersized.

He laughed and fitted his fingers together with great nicety.

'Are we to begin at once?' he asked. 'The congregation—haf they arrived?'

'Oh, there is no congregation,' explained Dodo; 'we are all performers. It is only a substitute for going to church. I hope you aren't shocked; it was such a disgusting morning.'

'Lady Chesterford is surely a congregation in herself,' remarked Herr Truffen, with elephantine elegance.

'Lord Chesterford is coming by-and-by,' continued Dodo. 'He has gone to church. I don't know whether he will be in time for the Mass.'

'Then you haf all the service in a little chapel here, no doubt,' said the Professor.

'Oh no,' said Dodo; 'we're going to have two

lessons and the Mass, and there isn't a chapel, it's only in the drawing-room. I'm going to read the lessons.'

Herr Truffen bowed with undiminished composure, and Dodo led the way back into the drawing-room.

Miss Grantham and Jack were introduced, and Dodo took her place at the praying-table, and Herr Truffen at the piano. Dodo gave out the lesson, and read the chapter through.

'Oh, it is nice!' she exclaimed. 'Sha'n't I go on to the next chapter? No, I think I won't.

'It would spoil the delightful impression of the very dry bones?' interrogated Herr Truffen from the piano. 'Ah, that is splendid; but you should hear it in the Fatherland tongue.'

'Now, Dodo, come here,' said Edith. 'We must go on with this. You can discuss it afterwards. On the third beat. Will you give us the time, Professor?'

The Mass had scarcely begun when Lord Chesterford came in, followed by Mrs Vivian and Maud. The Professor, who evidently did not quite under-

stand that he was merely a sort of organist, got up and shook hands all round with laboured cordiality. Edith grew impatient.

'Come,' she said, 'you mustn't do that. Remember you are practically in church, Professor. Please begin again.'

'Ah, I forgot for the moment,' remarked the Professor; 'this beautiful room made me not remember. Come—one, two. Ah, we must begin better than that. Now, please.'

This time the start was made in real earnest. Edith's magnificent voice, and the Professor's playing, would alone have been sufficient to make it effective. The four performers knew their parts well, and when it was finished, there followed that silence which is so much more appreciative than applause. Then Herr Truffen turned to Edith.

'Ah, how you have improved,' he said. 'Who taught you this? It is beyond me. Perhaps you prayed and fasted, and then it came to you.'

As Edith had chiefly written the Mass while smoking cigarettes after a hearty breakfast, she merely said,—

'How does anything come to one? It is part of

oneself, as much as one's arms and legs. But the service is not over yet.'

Dodo meanwhile had gone back to the praying-table.

'I can't find it,' she said, in a distracted whisper. 'It's a chapter in the Revelation about a grey horse and a white horse.'

'Dodo,' said Edith, in an awful voice.

'Yes, dear,' said Dodo. 'Ah, here it is.'

Dodo read the chapter with infinite feeling in her beautiful clear, full voice.

Chesterford was charmed. He had not seen this side of Dodo before. After she had finished, he came and sat by her, while the others got up and began talking among themselves.

'Dodo,' he said, 'I never knew you cared about these things. What an unsympathetic brute I must seem to you. I never talked to you about such things, because I thought you did not care. Will you forgive me?'

'I don't think you need forgiveness much,' said Dodo softly. 'If you only knew—' she stopped and finished her sentence by a smile.

'Dodo,' he said again, 'I've often wanted to

suggest something to you, but I didn't quite like to. Why don't we have family prayers here? I might build a little chapel.'

Dodo felt a sudden inclination to laugh. Her æsthetic pleasure in the chapter of Revelations was gone. She felt annoyed and amused at this simple-minded man, who thought her so perfect, and ascribed such fatiguingly high interpretations to all her actions. He really was a little stupid and tiresome. He had broken up all her little pleasant thoughts.

'Oh, family prayers always strike me as rather ridiculous,' she said, with a half yawn. A row of gaping servants are not conducive to the emotions.'

She got up and joined the other groups, and then suddenly became aware that, for the first time, she had failed in her part. Jack was watching her, and saw what had happened. Chesterford had remained seated in the window, pulling his long, brown moustache, with a very perceptible shade of annoyance on his face. Dodo felt a sudden impulse of anger with herself at her stupidity. She went back to Chesterford.

'Dear old boy,' she said, 'I don't know why I

said that. I was thinking of something else. I don't know that I like family prayers very much. We used to have them at home, when my father was with us, and it really was a trial to hear him read the Litany. I suppose it is that which has made me rather tired of them. Come and talk to the Professor.'

Then she went across to Jack.

'Jack,' she said, in a low voice, 'don't look as if you thought you were right.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE same afternoon Chesterford took Mrs Vivian off to see 'almshouses and drunkards,' as Dodo expressed it to Jack. She also told him that Edith and her Herr were playing a sort of chopsticks together in the drawing-room. Maud had, as usual, effaced herself, and Bertie was consuming an alarming number of cigarettes in the smoking-room, and pretending to write letters.

It was natural, therefore, that when Jack strolled into the hall, to see what was going on, he should find Dodo there with her toes on the fender of the great fireplace, having banished the collie to find other quarters for himself. Dodo was making an effort to read, but she was not being very successful, and hailed Jack's entrance with evident pleasure.

'Come along,' she said; 'I sent the dog off, but I can find room for you. Sit here, Jack.'

She moved her chair a little aside, and let him pass.

'I can't think why a merciful providence sends us a day like this,' she said. 'I want to know whom it benefits to have a thick snowfall. Listen at that, too,' she added, as a great gust of wind swept round the corner of the house, and made a deep, roaring sound up in the heart of the chimney.

'It makes it all the more creditable in Chesterford and Mrs Vivian to go to see the drunkards,' remarked Jack.

'Oh, but that's no credit,' said Dodo. 'They like doing it, it gives them real pleasure. I don't see why that should be any better, morally speaking, than sitting here and talking. They are made that way, you and I are made this. We weren't consulted, and we both follow our inclinations. Besides, they will have their reward, for they will have immense appetites at tea.'

'And will give us something to talk about now,' remarked Jack lazily.

'Don't you like Grantie, Jack?' asked Dodo presently. 'She and Ledgers are talking about life and being in my room. I went to get a book from here, and the fire was so nice that I stopped.'

'I wish Ledgers wouldn't treat her like a menagerie, and put her through her tricks,' said Jack. 'I think she is very attractive, but she belongs too much to a class.'

'What class?' demanded Dodo.

'Oh, the class that prides itself on not being of any class—the all things to all men class.'

'Oh, I belong to that,' said Dodo.

'No, you don't,' said he. 'You are all things to some men, I grant, but not to all.'

'Oh, Jack, that's a bad joke,' said Dodo reprovingly.

'It's quite serious all the same,' said he.

'I'm all things to the only man to whom it matters that I should be,' said Dodo complacently.

Jack felt rather disgusted.

'I wish you would not state things in that cold-blooded way,' he said. 'Your very frankness to me about it, shows that you know that it is an effort.'

'Yes,' she said, 'it is an effort sometimes, but I don't think I want to talk about it. You take things too ponderously. Don't be ponderous; it doesn't suit you in the least. Besides, there's nothing to be ponderous about.'

Dodo turned in her chair and looked Jack full in the face. Her face had a kind of triumph about it.

'I want to say something more,' said Jack.

'Well, I'm magnanimous to-day,' said Dodo. 'Go on.'

'All you are doing,' said he gravely, 'is to keep up the original illusion he had about you. It is not any good keeping up an illusion, and thinking you're doing your whole duty.'

'Jack, that's enough,' said Dodo, with a certain finality in her tone. 'If you go on, you may make me distrust myself. I don't mean that as a compliment to your powers, but as a confession to a stupid superstitious weakness in myself. I am afraid of omens.'

They sat silent a minute or two, until a door at the far end of the hall opened and Miss Grantham came through, with her showman in tow.

'Lord Ledgers and I were boring each other so,' said Miss Grantham, 'that we came to bore someone else. When you are boring people you may as well do it wholesale. What a pity it is that one hasn't got a tail like a dog, that cannot help wagging if its owner is pleased, and which stops wagging when he isn't.'

'I shall certainly buy a tail,' said Dodo, with grave consideration. 'One or two, in case the first gets out of order. Must you wag it whenever you are pleased, Grantie? Is it to be an honest tail? Supposing you only think you are pleased, when you are not really, what does the tail do then? Oh, it's very complicated.'

'The tail shares the same illusions as the dog,' said Miss Grantham.

'Jack and I were talking about illusions,' said Dodo.

'I'm going to get a quantity of illusions,' said Miss Grantham. 'In any case what did you find to say about them?'

'Jack said it was a bad thing to keep an illusion up,' said Dodo broadly.

Miss Grantham was staring pensively at the fire.

'I saw two boys sitting on a gate yesterday,' she said, 'and they pushed each other off, and each time they both roared with laughter. I'm sure it was an illusion that they were amused. I would go and sit on a gate with pleasure and get my maid to push me off, if I thought it would amuse either of us. Mr Broxton, would you like me to push you off a gate?'

'Oh, I'm certain that the people with many illusions are the happiest,' said Dodo. 'Consequently, I wouldn't willing destroy any illusion anyone held about anything.'

'What a lot of anys,' said Miss Grantham.

Lord Ledgers was leaning back in his chair with a sense of pleased proprietorship. It really was a very intelligent animal. Jack almost expected him to take a small whip from his pocket, and crack it at her. But his next remark, Jack felt, was a good substitute; at any rate he demanded another performance.

'What about delusions, Miss Grantham?' he said.

'Oh, delusions are chiefly unpleasant illusions,' she said. 'Madmen have delusions that somebody

wants to kill them, or that they want to kill somebody, or that King Charles's head isn't really cut off, which would be very unsettling now.'

'Grantie, I believe you're talking sheer, arrant nonsense,' said Dodo. 'It's all your fault, Tommy. When one is asked a question one has to answer it somehow or other in self-defence. If you asked me about the habits of giraffes I should say something. Edith is the only really honest person I know. She would tell you she hadn't any idea what a giraffe was, so would Chesterford, and you would find him looking up giraffes in the *Encyclopædia* afterwards.'

Lord Ledgers laughed a low, unpleasant laugh.

'A very palpable hit,' he murmured.

The remark was inaudible to all but Jack. He felt quite unreasonably angry with him, and got up from his chair.

Dodo saw something had happened, and looked at him inquiringly. Jack did not meet her eye, but whistled to the collie, who flopped down at his feet.

'I really don't know where I should begin if I was going to turn honest,' said Miss Grantham.

'I don't think I like honest people. They are like little cottages, which children draw, with a door in the middle, and a window at each side, and a chimney in the roof with smoke coming out. Long before you know them well, you are perfectly certain of all that you will find inside them. They haven't got any little surprises, or dark passages, or queer little cupboards under the stairs.'

'Do you know the plant called honesty, Grantie?' asked Dodo. 'It's very bright purple, and you can see it a long way off, and it isn't at all nicer when you get close, than it looks from a distance.'

'Oh, if you speak of someone as an honest man,' said Miss Grantham, 'it implies that he's nothing particular besides. I don't mind a little mild honesty, but it should be kept in the background.'

'I've got a large piece of honesty somewhere about me,' said Jack. 'I can't always lay my hand on it, but every now and then I feel it like a great lump inside me.'

'Yes,' said Dodo, 'I believe you are fundamentally honest, Jack. I've always thought that.'

'Does that mean that he is not honest in ordinary matters?' asked Miss Grantham. 'I've noticed that people who are fundamentally truthful, seldom tell the truth.'

'In a way it does,' said Dodo. 'But I'm sure Jack would be honest in any case where it really mattered.'

'Oh, I sha'n't steal your spoons, you know,' said Miss Grantham.

'That's only because you don't really want them,' remarked Dodo. 'I can conceive you stealing anything you wanted.'

'Trample on me,' said Miss Grantham serenely. 'Tell us what I should steal.'

'Oh, you'd steal lots of things,' said Dodo. 'You'd steal anyone's self-respect if you could manage to, and you couldn't get what you wanted any other way. Oh, yes, you'd steal anything important. Jack wouldn't. He'd stop just short of that; he would never be really disloyal. He'd finger things to any extent, but I am pretty sure that he would drop them at the last minute.'

'How dreadfully unpleasant I am really,' said Miss Grantham meditatively. 'A kind of Eugenie Aram.'

Jack was acutely uncomfortable, but he had the satisfaction of believing that what Dodo said about him was true. He had come to the same conclusion himself two nights ago. He believed that he would stop short of any act of disloyalty, but he did not care about hearing Dodo give him so gratuitous a testimonial before Miss Grantham and the gentleman whom he mentally referred to as 'that ass of a showman.'

The front door opened, and a blast of cold wind came blustering round into the inner hall where they were sitting, making the thick tapestry *portière* belly and fill like a ship's sail, when the wind first catches it. The collie pricked his ears, and thumped his tail on the floor with vague welcome.

Mrs Vivian entered, followed by Lord Chesterford. He looked absurdly healthy and happy.

'It's a perfectly beastly day,' he said cheerfully, advancing to the fireplace. 'Mrs Vivian, let Dodo send you some tea up to your room. You must be wet through. Surely it is tea-time, Dodo.'

'I told you so,' said Dodo to Jack.

'Has Jack been saying it isn't tea-time?' asked Chesterford.

'No,' said Dodo. 'I only said that your virtue in going to see almshouses, would find its immediate reward in an appetite for tea.'

Mrs Vivian laughed.

'You mustn't reduce our virtues to the lowest terms, as if we were two vulgar fractions.'

'Do you suppose a vulgar fraction knows how vulgar it is?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Vulgar without being funny,' said Jack, with the air of helping her out of a difficulty.

'I never saw anything funny in vulgar fractions,' remarked Lord Ledgers. 'Chesterford and I used to look up the answers at the end of the book, and try to make them correspond with the questions.'

Dodo groaned.

'Oh, Chesterford, don't tell me you're not honest either.'

'What do you think about honesty, Mrs Vivian?' asked Miss Grantham.

Mrs Vivian considered.

'Honesty is much maligned by being called the best policy,' she said, 'it isn't purely commercial. Honesty is rather fine sometimes.'

'Oh, I'm sure Mrs Vivian's honest,' murmured Miss Grantham. 'She thinks before she tells you her opinion. I always give my opinion first, and think about it afterwards.'

'I've been wanting to stick up for honesty all afternoon,' said Dodo to Mrs Vivian, 'only I haven't dared. Everyone has been saying that it is dull and obtrusive, and like labourers' cottages. I believe we are all a little honest, really. No one has got any right to call it the best policy. It makes you feel as if you were either a kind of life insurance, or else a thief.'

Chesterford looked a trifle puzzled.

Dodo turned to him.

'Poor old man,' she said, 'did they call him names? Never mind. We'll go and be labelled "Best policy. No others need apply."'

She got up from her chair, and pulled Chesterford's moustache.

'You look so abominably healthy, Chesterford,' she said. 'How's Charlie getting on? Tell him if he beats his wife any more, I shall beat you. You wouldn't like that, you know. Will you ring for tea, dear? Mrs Vivian I command you to go to

your room. I had your fire lit, and I'll send tea up. You're a dripping sop.'

Mrs Vivian pleaded guilty and vanished. Sounds of music still came from the drawing-room. 'It's no use telling Edith to come to tea,' remarked Dodo. 'She said the other day that if anyone ever proposed to her, whom she cared to marry, she will feel it only fair to tell him that the utmost she can offer him, is to play second fiddle to her music.'

Edith's music was strongly exciting, and in the pause that followed, Dodo went to the door and opened it softly, and a great tangle of melody poured out and filled the hall. She was playing the last few pages of the overture to an opera that she had nearly completed. The music was gathering itself up for the finale. Note after note was caught up, as it were, to join an army of triumphant melody overhead, which grew fuller and more complete every moment, and seemed to hover, waiting for some fulfilment. Ah, that was it. Suddenly from below crashed out a great kingly motif, strong with the strength of a man who is pure and true, rising higher and higher,

till it joined the triumph overhead, and moved away, strong to the end.

There was a dead silence; Dodo was standing by the door, with her lips slightly parted, feeling that there was something in this world better and bigger, perhaps, than her own little hair-splittings and small emotions. With this in her mind, she looked across to where Chesterford was standing. The movement was purely instinctive, and she could neither have accounted for it, nor was she conscious of it, but in her eyes there was the suggestion of unshed tears, and a look of questioning shame. Though a few bars of music cannot change the nature of the weakest of us, and Dodo was far from weak, she was intensely impressionable, and that moment had for her the germ of a possibility which might—who can say it could not?—have taken root in her and borne fruit. The parable of the mustard seed is as old and as true as time. But Chesterford was not musical; he had taken a magazine from the table, and was reading about grouse disease.

CHAPTER VII.

DODO was sitting in a remarkably easy-chair in her own particular room at the house in Eaton Square. As might have been expected, her room was somewhat unlike other rooms. It had a pale orange-coloured paper, with a dado of a rather more intense shade of the same colour, an orange-coloured carpet and orange-coloured curtains. Dodo had no reason to be afraid of orange colour just yet. It was a room well calculated to make complete idleness most easy. The tables were covered with a mass of albums, vases of flowers, and a quantity of entirely useless knick-knacks. The walls were hung with several rather clever sketches, French prints and caricatures of Dodo's friends. A small bookcase displayed a quantity of flaring novels, and a large tune hymn-book, and in a conspicuous corner was Dodo's praying-table,

on which the skull regarded its surroundings with a mirthless and possible contemptuous grin. The mantelpiece was entirely covered with photographs, all signed by their prototypes. These had found their quarters gradually becoming too small for them, and had climbed half way up the two sides of a Louis Quinze mirror, that formed a sort of over-mantel. The photographs were an interesting study, and included representatives from a very wide range of classes. No one ever accused Dodo of being exclusive. In the corner of the room were a heap of old cotillion toys, several hunting-whips, and a small black image of the Virgin, which Dodo had picked up abroad. Above her head a fox's mask grinned defiantly at another fox's brush opposite. On the writing-table there was an inkstand made of the hoof of Dodo's favourite hunter, which had joined the majority shortly after Christmas, and the 'Dodo' symphony, which had just come out with great *éclat* at the Albert Hall, leant against the wall. A banjo case and a pair of castanets, with a dainty silver monogram on them, perhaps inspired Dodo when she sat down to her writing-table.

Dodo's hands were folded on her lap, and she was lazily regarding a photograph of herself which stood on the mantelpiece. Though the afternoon was of a warm day in the end of May, there was a small fire in the hearth which crackled pleasantly. Dodo got up and looked at the photograph more closely. 'I certainly look older,' she thought to herself, 'and yet that was only taken a year ago. I don't feel a bit older, at least I sha'n't when I get quite strong again. I wish Jack could have been able to come this afternoon. I am rather tired of seeing nobody except Chesterford and the baby. However, Mrs Vivian will be here soon.'

Dodo had made great friends with Mrs Vivian during the last months. Her sister and brother-in-law had been obliged to leave England for a month at Easter, and Dodo had insisted that Mrs Vivian should spend it with them, and to-day was the first day that the doctor had let her come down, and she had written to Jack and Mrs Vivian to come and have tea with her.

A tap was heard at the door, and the nurse entered, bearing the three weeks' old baby. Dodo

was a little disappointed; she had seen a good deal of the baby, and she particularly wanted Mrs Vivian. She stood with her hands behind her back, without offering to take it. The baby regarded her with large wide eyes, and crowed at the sight of the fire. Really it was rather attractive, after all.

'Well, Lord Harchester,' remarked Dodo, 'how is your lordship to-day? Did it ever enter your very pink head that you were a most important personage? Really you have very little sense of your dignity. Oh, you *are* rather nice. Come here, baby.'

She held out her arms to take it, but his lordship apparently did not approve of this change. He opened his mouth in preparation for a decent protest.

'Ah, do you know, I don't like you when you howl,' said Dodo; 'you might be an Irish member instead of a piece of landed interest. Oh, do stop. Take him please, nurse; I've got a headache, and I don't like that noise. There, you unfilial scoundrel, you're quiet enough now.'

Dodo nodded at the baby with the air of a slight acquaintance.

'I wonder if you'll be like your father,' she said; 'you've got his big blue eyes. I rather wish your eyes were dark. Do a baby's eyes change when he gets older? Ah, here's your godmother. I am so glad to see you,' she went on to Mrs Vivian. 'You see his lordship has come down to say how do you do.'

'Dear Dodo,' said Mrs Vivian, 'you are looking wonderfully better. Why don't they let you go out this lovely day?'

'Oh, I've got a cold,' said Dodo, 'at least I'm told so. There—good-bye, my lord. You'd better take him upstairs again, nurse. I am so delighted to see you,' she continued, pouring out tea. 'I've been rather dull all day. Don't you know how, when you particularly want to see people, they never come. Edith looked in this morning, but she did nothing but whistle and drop things. I asked Jack to come, but he couldn't.'

'Ah,' said Mrs Vivian softly, 'he has come back, has he?'

'Yes,' said Dodo, 'and I wanted to see him. Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous as his going off in that way. You know he left England

directly after his visit to us in January, and he's only just back. It's too absurd for Jack to pretend he was ill. He swore his doctor had told him to leave England for three months. Of course that's nonsense. It was very stupid of him.'

Mrs Vivian sipped her tea reflectively without answering.

'Chesterford is perfectly silly about the baby,' Dodo went on. 'He's always afraid it's going to be ill, and he goes up on tiptoe to the nursery, to see if it's all right. Last night he woke me up about half-past ten, to say that he had heard it cough several times, and did I think it was the whooping cough.'

Mrs Vivian did not seem to be listening.

'I heard from Mr Broxton once,' she said; 'he wrote from Moscow, and asked how you were, and three weeks ago he telegraphed, when he heard of the birth of the baby.'

'I don't know what's the matter with Jack,' said Dodo, rather petulantly. 'He wrote to me once, the silliest letter you ever saw, describing the Cremlin, and Trèves Cathedral, and the falls of the Rhine. The sort of letter one writes to one's

great-aunt. Now I'm not Jack's great-aunt at all.'

There was another tap at the door.

'That's Chesterford,' remarked Dodo, 'he always taps now, and if I don't answer, he thinks I'm asleep, and then he goes away. You just see.'

The tap came again, and after a moment's interval the door opened.

'Jack!' exclaimed Dodo.

She got up from her chair and went quickly towards him. Jack was pale, and his breath came rather short, as if he had been running.

'Why, Dodo,' he cried, 'I thought I couldn't come, and then I thought I could, so I did.'

He broke off rather lamely, and greeted Mrs Vivian.

'Dear old Jack,' said Dodo, 'it does me good to see you. Your face is so nice and familiar, and I've wanted you awfully. Jack, what do you mean by writing me such a stupid letter? especially when I'd written to you so nicely. Really, I am not your grandmother yet, though I am a mother. Have you seen the baby? It isn't particularly interesting at present, though of course it's rather nice to think that that wretched little morsel of flesh and bones is

going to be one of our landed proprietors. He'll be much more important than you will ever be, Jack. Aren't you jealous?'

Dodo was conscious of quite a fresh tide of interest in her life. Her intellectual faculties, she felt, had been neglected. She could not conceive why, because she had a husband and baby, she should be supposed not to care for other interests as well. Chesterford was an excellent husband with a magnificent heart, but Dodo had told herself so often that he was not very clever, that she had ceased trying to take an intellectual pleasure in his society, and the baby could not be called intellectual by the fondest parent at present. There were a quantity of women who were content to pore on their baby's face for hour after hour, with no further occupation than saying 'Didums' occasionally. Dodo had given what she considered a fair trial to this treatment, and she found it bored her to say 'Didums' for an indefinite period, and she did not believe it amused the baby. She had a certain pride in having given birth to the son and heir of one of the largest English properties, and she was extremely glad to have done so, and felt a

certain pleased sort of proprietorship in the little pink morsel, but she certainly had experienced none of the absorbing pleasures of maternity. She had got used to not being in love with her husband, and she accepted as part of this same deficiency the absence of absorbing pleasure in the baby. Not that she considered it a deficiency, it was merely another type turned out of Nature's workshop. Dodo laid all the blame on Nature. She shrugged her shoulders and said: 'You made me so without consulting me. It isn't my fault!' But Dodo was aware that Nature had given her a brain, and she found a very decided pleasure in the company of clever people. Perhaps it was the greatest pleasure of her life to be admired and amused by clever people. Of course Chesterford always admired her, but he was in love with her, and he was not clever. Dodo had felt some difficulty before her marriage in dealing with this perplexing unknown quantity, and she had to confess it puzzled her still. The result was, that when it occurred, she had to admit her inability to tackle it, and as soon as possible to turn to another page in this algebra of life.

But she still felt that her marriage had been a great success. Chesterford had entirely fulfilled what she expected of him : he was immensely rich, he let her do as she liked, he adored her. Dodo quite felt that it was better that he should adore her. As long as that lasted, he would be blind to any fault of hers, and she acknowledged that, to a man of Chesterford's character, she must seem far from faultless, if he contemplated her calmly. But he was quite unable to contemplate her calmly. For him she walked in a golden cloud that dazzled and entranced him. Dodo was duly grateful to the golden cloud.

But she felt that the element which Jack, and Mrs Vivian, and other friends of hers brought, had been conspicuously absent, and she welcomed its return with eagerness.

'You know we haven't been leading a very intellectual life lately,' Dodo continued. 'Chesterford is divinely kind to me, but he is careful not to excite me. So he talks chiefly about the baby, and how he lost his umbrella at the club ; it is very soothing, but I have got past that now. I want stimulating. Sometimes I go to sleep, and

then he sits as still as a mouse till I wake again. Pity me, Jack, I have had a dull fortnight; and that is worse than anything else. I really never remember being bored before!'

Dodo let her arms drop beside her with a little hopeless gesture.

'I know one has got no business to be bored, and it is one's own fault as a rule if one is,' she went on. 'For instance, that woman in the moated Grange ought to have swept away the blue fly that buzzed in the pane, and set a mouse trap for the mouse that shrieked, and got the carpenter to repair the mouldering wainscot, and written to the Psychical Research, how she had heard her own sad name in corners cried, and it couldn't have been the cat, or she would have caught the shrieking mouse. Oh, there was a thousand things she might have done, before she sat down and said, "He cometh not." But I have had a period of enforced idleness. If I had set a trap for the mouse, the doctor would have told me not to exert myself so much. I used to play Halma with Chesterford, only I always beat him; and then nobody ever cried my name in sad corners, that

I remember; it would have been quite interesting.'

Jack laughed.

'What a miserable story, Dodo,' he said. 'I always said you had none of the domestic virtues, and I am right it seems.'

'Oh, it isn't that,' said Dodo, 'but I happen to have a brain as well, and if I don't use it, it decays, and when it decays, it breeds maggots. I've got a big maggot in my head now, and that is, that the ineffable joys of maternity are much exaggerated. Don't look shocked, Geraldine. I know it's a maggot, and simply means that I haven't personally experienced them, but the maggot says, "You are a woman, and if you don't experience them, either they don't exist, or you are abnormal." Well, the maggot lies. I know it, I believe they do exist, and I am sure I am not abnormal. Ah, this is unprofitable, isn't it. You two have come to drive the maggot out.'

Mrs Vivian felt a sudden impulse of anger which melted into pity.

'Poor Dodo,' she said, 'leave the maggot alone, and he will die of inanition. At present give me

some more tea. This really is very good tea, and you drink it the proper way, without milk or sugar, and with a little slice of lemon.'

'Tea is such a middle-aged thing any other way,' said Dodo, pouring out another cup. 'I feel like an old woman in a workhouse if I put milk and sugar in it. Besides, you should only drink tea at tea. It produces the same effect as tobacco, a slight soothing of the nerves. One doesn't want to be soothed at breakfast, otherwise the tedious things we all have to do in the morning are impossible. Chesterford has a passion for the morning. He quoted something the other day about the divine morning. It isn't divine, it is necessary; at least you can't get to the evening without a morning, in this imperfect world. Now if it had only been "the evening and the evening were the first day," what a difference it would have made.'

Mrs Vivian laughed.

'You always bring up the heavy artillery to defend a small position, Dodo,' she said. 'Keep your great guns for great occasions.'

'Oh, I always use big guns,' said Jack. 'They do

the work quicker. Besides, you never can tell that the small position is not the key to the large. The baby, for instance, that Dodo thinks very extremely insignificant now, may be horribly important in twenty years.'

'Yes, I daresay Chesterford and I will quarrel about him,' said Dodo. 'Supposing he falls in love with a curate's daughter, Chesterford will say something about love in a cottage, and I shall want him to marry a duke's daughter, and I shall get my way, and everybody concerned will be extremely glad afterwards.'

'Poor baby,' said Mrs Vivian, 'you little think what a worldly mother you have.'

'Oh, I know I am worldly,' said Dodo. 'I don't deny it for a moment. Jack and I had it out before my marriage. But I believe I am capable of an unworldly action now and then. Why, I should wish Maud to marry a curate very much. She would do her part admirably, and no one could say it was a worldly fate. But I like giving everybody their chance. That is why I have Maud to stay with me, and let her get a good look at idle worldly people like Jack. After a

girl has seen every sort, I wish her to choose, and I am unworldly enough to applaud her choice, if it is unworldly; only I shouldn't do it myself. I have no ideal; it was left out.'

Jack was conscious of a keen resentment at Dodo's words. He had accepted her decision, but he didn't like to have it flaunted before him in Dodo's light voice and careless words. He made an uneasy movement in his chair. Dodo saw it.

'Ah, Jack, I have offended you,' she said; 'it was stupid of me. But I have been so silent and lonely all these days, that it is such a relief to let my tongue wag at all, whatever it says. Ah, here's Chesterford. What an age you have been. Here am I consoling myself as best I can. Isn't it nice to have Jack again?'

Chesterford saw the fresh light in her eyes, and the fresh vivaciousness in her speech, and he was so unfeignedly glad to see her more herself again, that no thought of jealousy entered his heart. He thought without bitterness, 'How glad she must be to have her friends about her again. She looks better already. Decidedly I am a stupid old fellow but I think Dodo loves me a little.'

He shook hands with Jack, and beamed delightedly on Dodo.

'Jack, it is good of you to come so soon,' he said; 'Dodo has missed you dreadfully. Have you seen the boy? Dodo, may I have him down?'

'Oh, he's been down,' said she, 'and has only just gone up again. He's rather fractious to-day: I daresay it's teeth. It's nothing to bother about; he's as well as possible.'

Lord Chesterford looked disappointed, but acquiesced.

'I should like Jack to see him all the same,' he remarked. 'May he come up to the nursery?'

'Oh, Jack doesn't care about babies,' said Dodo, 'even when they belong to you and me. Do you, Jack? I assure you it won't amuse you a bit.'

'I can't go away without seeing the baby,' said Jack, 'so I think I'll go with Chesterford, and then I must be off. Good-bye, Dodo. Get well quickly. May I come and see you to-morrow?'

'I wish Chesterford wouldn't take Jack off in that way,' said Dodo, rather querulously, as they

left the room. 'Jack came to see me, and I wanted to talk more to him—I'm very fond of Jack. If he wasn't so fearfully lazy, he'd make no end of a splash. But he prefers talking to his friends to talking to a lot of Irish members. I wonder why he came after he said he wouldn't. Jack usually has good reasons.'

Dodo lay back in her chair and reflected.

'You really are the most unnatural mother,' said Mrs Vivian, with a laugh. 'I am glad Mr Broxton went with your husband, or he would have been disappointed, I think.'

Dodo looked a little anxious.

'He wasn't vexed, was he?' she asked. 'I hate vexing people, especially Chesterford. But he really is ridiculous about the baby. It is absurd to suppose it is interesting yet.'

'I don't suppose he would call it interesting,' said Mrs Vivian. 'But you know there are other things beside that.'

Dodo grew a trifle impatient.

'Ah, that's a twice-told tale,' she said. 'I consider I have done my duty admirably, but just now I confess I am pining for a little amusement. I have

been awfully dull. You know one can't exist on pure love.'

Mrs Vivian rose to go.

'Well, I must be off,' she said. 'Good-night, Dodo; and remember this, if ever anything occurs on which you want advice or counsel, come to me for it. You know I have been through all this; and—and remember Lord Chesterford loves you very deeply.'

Dodo looked up inquiringly.

'Yes, of course, I know that,' she said, 'and we get on magnificently together. In any case I should always ask you for advice. You know I used to be rather afraid of you.'

Mrs Vivian stood looking out of the window. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

'Ah, my dear, don't be afraid of me,' she said.

Dodo wondered, when she had gone, what made her so suddenly grave. Her own horizon was singularly free from clouds. She had been through an experience which she had looked forward to with something like dread. But that was over; she and the baby were both alive and well. Chesterford was more devoted than ever, and she?—well, she was

thoroughly satisfied. And Jack had come back, and all was going delightfully.

'They all talk about love as if it were something very dreadful,' she thought. 'I'm sure it isn't dreadful at all. It is rather a bore sometimes; at least one can have enough of it, but that is a fault on the right side.'

The door opened softly, and Chesterford came in.

'I am glad to find you alone, darling,' he said, 'I haven't seen you all day. You are looking much better. Get Jack to come and see you again as soon as he can.'

Dodo smiled benignantly on him.

'The baby really is wonderful,' he continued. 'It was sitting up with its bottle just now, and I really believe it winked at me when it saw me. Do you think it knows me?'

'Oh, I daresay it does,' said Dodo; 'it sees enough of you anyhow.'

'Isn't it all wonderful,' he went on, not noticing her tone. 'Just fancy. Sometimes I wonder whether it's all real.'

'It's real enough when it cries,' said Dodo. 'But it is rather charming, I do think.'

'It's got such queer little fists,' said he, 'with nice pink nails.'

Dodo laughed rather wearily.

'Are you a little tired, darling?' he said. 'Won't you go to bed? You know you've been up quite a long time. Perhaps you'd like to see the baby before you go.'

'Oh, I said good-night to the baby,' said Dodo. 'I think I will go to bed. I wish you'd send Wilkins here.'

He bent over her and kissed her forehead softly.

'Ah, my darling, my darling,' he whispered.

Dodo lay with half shut eyes.

'Good-night, dear,' she said languidly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE questions about which a man is apt to say that he alone can judge, are usually exactly those questions in which his judgment is most likely to be at fault, for they concern him very intimately—a truth which he expresses by saying that he alone can judge about them, and for that very reason his emotions are apt to colour what he considers his sober decision.

Jack was exactly in this position when he left the Chesterfords' door that afternoon. It was only six o'clock when he went away, and he wished to be alone, and to think about it. But the house seemed stuffy and unsuggestive, and he ordered a horse, and sat fuming and frowning till it came round. It fidgeted and edged away from the pavement, when he tried to mount it, and he said, 'Get out, you brute,

with remarkable emphasis, and asked the groom whether he hadn't yet learned how to hold a horse quiet. This was sufficient to show that he was in a perturbed frame of mind.

The Row was rather empty, for a great race meeting was going on, and Jack cantered quickly up to the end, and cursed his stupidity for not having gone to Sandown. Then he put his horse to a quiet pace, and determined to think the matter out.

He had left the Chesterfords in January with a full realisation of his position. He was in love with Dodo, perhaps more deeply than ever, and Dodo was hopelessly, irrevocably out of his reach. The only thing left to be done was to get over it; but his ordinary circle, and its leisurely duties were quite impossible just at present, and he adopted the traditional English method of travelling, and shooting unoffending animals. Whether the absence of faith was responsible, is an open question; at any rate the remedy did not result in a cure. He was intensely bored with foreign countries; they were quite as distasteful as England, and, on the whole had less to offer. And

he came back to London again as suddenly as he had left it. He only remembered one incident in his four months abroad, which gave him any pleasure; that was when he received a letter from Dodo at Berlin, which said nothing particular, and wound up with a little mild chaff on the absurdity of his going abroad at all. 'I hope you're really better,' wrote Dodo, 'though I didn't know that you were in any immediate danger of breaking down when you left us. Anyhow come back. London is particularly wholesome, and, to tell you the truth, it's just a wee bit dull. Don't be conceited.'

Of course he came back; it was no good remaining abroad, and yawning in front of the Sistine Madonna, who, in her impossible serene mildness, had no message whatever for him. He wanted to see Dodo; why on earth shouldn't he? She was the only thing he really cared about, and she was quite out of his reach. Where was the harm?

For two days after his arrival in London he was still undecided, and made no effort to see her, and on the third day her note came. London was as bad as Dresden, and again, where was the harm?

He wrote a note saying he would come, then he tore that up and sent a refusal, offering no excuse, and after all, he had gone, and parted from her with the words that he would come again the next day. But ah, how sweet it was to see her again! Such were the facts upon which Jack wished to form a conclusion. All this indecision was really too annoying. What was the use of a conscience that took the sugar out of your tea, and yet could not prevent you from drinking it? It was not strong enough to prevent him going to see Dodo, and it took the malicious line of making the visit as little enjoyable as possible. Well, it must be settled one way or the other.

The problem obviously depended on one question. Did his desire for Dodo grow stronger with seeing her? He decided that it did not make much difference to the quality or degree of his longing, but, on the other hand, her society gave him an inestimable pleasure. When she had refused him a year ago, he had gone on seeing her day after day, without the horrible, unsatisfied emptiness that he had felt abroad. That absorbing craving for her, he remembered, began when she was on

her wedding tour. Then why not see her freely and frequently? No harm could possibly come out of it. Dodo, he thought, cared for him only as she cared for a dozen other friends, why should he, then, who cared so deeply for her, cut himself off from her? Again his deep-rooted affection and respect for her husband was an immense safeguard. Quixotism was a doubtful virtue at the best, and decidedly out of date, and besides, what would Dodo think if she suddenly found that one of her best friends invariably declined to meet her under any circumstances? She would certainly guess the reason, and if there was one possible solution of this stupid problem more undesirable than another, it was that. And Jack made up his mind.

Well, that was settled, and here was Bertie riding down upon him. He felt as if he wished to record a deliberate and sober conclusion. They joined forces and rode up together.

Then Jack said suddenly,—

'Bertie, I have been making a fool of myself, but I am better now.'

'That's good,' said Bertie placidly.

There was something indefinably soothing about Bertie's manner. Jack determined to be more explicit. It is often a relief to tell a friend one's own resolutions, especially if one does not expect unseasonable objections.

'It's about Dodo,' he said. 'You see I'm dreadfully in love with her. Awkward, isn't it?'

'Devilish,' said Bertie, without a shade of emotion passing over his face.

'And the less I see of her, said Jack, 'the worse I get, so I've determined that the more I see of her in the ordinary way, the better. It sounds an unusual treatment, I know, but you must acknowledge I gave the other method a fair chance. I went and killed pigs in Austria, and climbed the Matterhorn, but it wouldn't do.'

They rode on a little time in silence. Then Bertie said,—

'Do you want my advice?'

'Well, yes,' said Jack rather dubiously.

'Then I'm dashed if I like it, Jack,' he said. 'It's too dangerous. Just think—'

But Jack broke in,—

'Don't you see my friendship for Chesterford

is an absolute safeguard. Dodo gives me more pleasure than anyone I know, and when I can't see her, life becomes unbearable. Chesterford is one of those men to whom one couldn't do a mean thing, and, furthermore, Dodo doesn't love me. If those two facts don't ensure safety, I don't know what would. Besides, Bertie, I'm not a rascal.'

'I can't like it,' said Bertie. 'If one has a propensity for falling into the fire, it's as well to keep off the hearthrug. I know you're not a rascal, but this is a thing one can't argue about. It is a matter of feeling.'

'I know,' said Jack, 'I've felt it too. But I think it's outweighed by other considerations. If I thought any mischief could come of it, I should deserve to be horse-whipped.'

'I don't like it,' repeated Bertie stolidly.

Jack went to see Dodo the next afternoon, and for many afternoons during the next fortnight he might have been seen on Chesterford's doorstep, either coming or going. Her husband seemed almost as glad as Dodo that Jack should come often. His visits were obviously very pleasant

to her, and she had begun to talk nonsense again as fluently as ever. With Jack, however, she had some rather serious talks; his future appeared to be exercising her mind somewhat. Jack's life at this time was absolutely aimless. Before he had gone abroad he had been at the Bar, and had been called, but his chambers now knew him no more. He had no home duties, being, as Dodo expressed it, 'a poor little orphan of six foot two,' and he had enough money for an idle bachelor life. Dodo took a very real interest in the career of her friends. It was part of her completeness, as I have said before, to be the centre of a set of successful people. Jack could do very well, she felt, in the purely ornamental line, and she by no means wished to debar him from the ornamental profession, but yet she was vaguely dissatisfied. She induced him one day to state in full, exactly the ideas he had about his own future.

'You dangle very well indeed,' she said to him, 'and I'm far from wishing you not to dangle, but, if it's to be your profession, you must do it more systematically. Lady Wrayston was here

yesterday, and she said no one ever saw you now. That's lazy; you're neglecting your work.'

Jack was silent a few minutes. The truth of the matter was that he was becoming so preoccupied with Dodo, that he was acquiring a real distaste for other society. His days seemed to have dwindled down to an hour or two hours each, according to the time he passed with Dodo. The interval between his leaving the house one day, and returning to it the next, had got to be merely a tedious period of waiting, which he would gladly have dispensed with. In such intervals society appeared to him not a distraction, but a laborious substitute for inaction, and labour at any time was not congenial to him. His life, in fact, was a series of conscious pulses with long-drawn pauses in between. He was dimly aware that this sort of thing could not go on for ever. The machine would stop, or get quicker or slower, and there were endless complications imminent in either case.

'I don't know that I really care for dangling,' said Jack discontentedly. 'At the same time it is the least objectionable form of amusement.'

'Well, you can't dangle for ever in any case,' said Dodo. 'You ought to marry and settle down. Chesterford is a sort of apotheosis of a dangler. By performing, with scrupulous care, a quantity of little things that don't matter much, like being J.P., and handing the offertory plate, he is in a way quite a busy man, to himself at least, though nothing would happen if he ceased doing any or all of these things; and the dangler, who thinks himself busy, is the happiest of men, because he gets all the advantages of dangling, and none of the disadvantages, and his conscience — have you got a conscience, Jack?—so far from pricking him, tells him he's doing the whole duty of man. Then again he's married — to me, too. That's a profession in itself.'

'Ah, but I can't be married to you too,' remarked Jack.

'You're absurd,' said Dodo; 'but really, Jack, I wish you'd marry someone else. I sha'n't think you unfaithful.'

'I don't flatter myself that you would,' said Jack, with a touch of irritation.

Dodo looked up rather surprised at the hard

ring in his voice. She thought it wiser to ignore this last remark.

'I never can quite make out whether you are ambitious or not,' she said. 'Now and then you make me feel as if you would rather like to go and live in a small cathedral town—'

'And shock the canons?' suggested Jack.

'Not necessarily; but cultivate sheer domesticity. You're very domestic in a way. Bertie would do admirably in a cathedral town. He'd be dreadfully happy among dull people. They would all think him so brilliant and charming, and the bishop would ask him over to dine at the palace whenever anyone came down from London.'

'I'm not ambitious in the way of wanting to score small successes,' said Jack. 'Anyone can score them. I don't mind flying at high game and missing. If you miss of course you have to load again, but I'd sooner do that than make a bag of rabbits. Besides, you can get your rabbits sitting, as you go after your high game. But I don't want rabbits.'

'What is your high game?' asked Dodo.

Jack considered.

'It's this,' he said. 'You may attain it, or at anyrate strive after it, by doing nothing, or working like a horse. But, anyhow, it's being in the midst of things, it's seeing the wheels go round, and forming conclusions as to why they go round, it's hearing the world go rushing by like a river in flood, it's knowing what everyone thinks about, it's guessing why one woman falls in love with one man, and why another man falls in love with her. You don't get that in cathedral towns. The archdeacon's daughter falls in love with the dean's son, and nobody else is at all in love with either of them. The world doesn't rattle in cathedral towns, they take care to oil it; the world doesn't come down in flood in cathedral towns, there is nothing so badly regulated as that. I don't know why I should choose cathedral towns particularly to say these things about. I think you suggested that I should live in one. If you like you can plunge into the river in flood and go down with it—that's what they call having a profession — but it's just as instructive to stand on the bank and watch it; more instructive, perhaps, because you needn't swim, and can give

your whole attention to it. On the whole, that is what I mean to do.'

'That's good, Jack,' said Dodo; 'but you're not consistent. The fact that you haven't been going out lately, shows that you're standing with your back to it, with your hands in your pocket. After all, what you say only comes to this, that you are interested in the problem of human life. Well, there's just as much human life in your cathedral town.'

'Ah, but there's no go about it,' said he. 'It's no more like life than a duck pond is to the river in flood.'

'Oh, you're wrong there,' said Dodo. 'It goes on just the same, though it doesn't make such a fuss. But in any case you are standing with your back to it now, as I said.'

'I'm going into details, just at present,' said Jack.

'How do you mean?'

'I'm watching a little bit of it.'

'I suppose you mean Chesterford and me. Do you find us very interesting?' demanded Dodo.

'Very.'

Jack was rather uncomfortable. He wanted to say more, and wished he hadn't said so much. He wondered how Dodo would take it.

Dodo did not take it at all. She was, for the time at anyrate, much more interested in Jack's prospects as they concerned him, than as they bore on herself.

'What is the upshot of all your observations?' she asked.

Jack hardly knew whether to feel relieved or slighted. Was Dodo's apparent unconsciousness of the tenor of what he had said, genuine or affected? On that he felt a great deal depended. But whether it was genuine or not, the matter was closed for the present. Dodo repeated her question.

'My observations on you, or on the world in general?' he asked.

'Either will do,' said Dodo; 'we're very normal. Any conclusion you have formed about the rest of the world will apply to us.'

'My conclusion is that you are not quite normal,' said he.

Dodo laughed.

'Oh, I'm dreadfully normal,' she said; 'all my inconsistencies lie on the surface—I'm married, I've got a baby, I'm honest, I'm lazy. I'm all I should and shouldn't be. And Chesterford—'

'Oh, then Chesterford's normal too,' said Jack.

CHAPTER IX.

JUNE was drawing to a close in a week of magnificent weather. It was too hot to do much during the middle of the day, and the Park was full of riders every morning from eight till ten. Dodo was frequently to be seen there, usually riding a vicious black mare, that plunged and shied more than Lord Chesterford quite liked. But Dodo insisted on riding it.

'The risks one runs every moment of one's life,' she told him, 'are so many, that one or two more really don't matter. Besides, I can manage the brute.'

On this particular morning Dodo descended the stairs feeling unusually happy. The period of enforced idleness was over, and she was making up for lost time with a vengeance. They had given

a dance the night before, and Dodo had not gone to bed till after four; but for all that she was down again at half-past eight, and her mare was waiting for her. She turned into the dining-room to have a cup of tea before starting, and waited somewhat impatiently for Lord Chesterford to join her. He came in, in the course of a few minutes, looking rather worried.

'You look as if you had not gone to bed for a week,' said Dodo, 'and your hair is dreadfully untidy. Look at me now. Here I am a weak little woman, and I feel fit to move mountains, and you look as if you wanted quinine and iron. Don't come, if you'd rather not. Stop at home and play with the baby.'

'I'm all right,' said he, 'but I'm rather worried about the boy. The nurse says he's not been sleeping much all night, but kept waking and crying, and he looks rather flushed. I think I'll send for the doctor.'

Dodo felt a little impatient.

'He's as right as possible,' she said. 'You shouldn't worry so, Chesterford. You've wanted to send for the doctor a hundred times in the

last month, either for him or me. But don't come if you'd rather not. Vivy is coming to breakfast at half-past nine; I quite forgot that. If you feel inclined to stop, you might give her breakfast, and I'll lengthen my ride. I shall be back by half-past ten. She's going to take me to see Wainright's new Turner.'

'Are you sure you don't mind, Dodo?' said he, still wavering. 'If you don't, I really think I will stop, and perhaps see the doctor about him. The nurse says she would like to have the doctor here.'

'Just as you like,' said Dodo. 'You'll have to pay a swinging bill anyhow. Good-bye, old boy. Don't worry your silly old head. I'm sure it's all right.'

Dodo went off perfectly at ease in her mind. Chesterford was rather fussy, she thought, and she congratulated herself on not being nervous. 'A pretty pair we should make if I encouraged him in his little ways,' she said to herself. 'We should one of us live in the nursery.' She put her horse into a quick trot, and felt a keen enjoyment in managing the vicious animal. The streets

were somewhat crowded even at this hour, and Dodo had her work cut out for her.

However, she reached the Park in safety, and went up the Row at a swinging gallop, with her horse tearing at the rein and tossing its head. After a time the brute grew quieter, and Dodo joined a well-known figure who was riding some way in front of her.

'Good old Jack,' she cried, 'isn't it splendid! I had no idea how I loved motion and exercise and dancing and all that till I began again. Didn't you think our ball went off rather well? Did you stop till the end? Oh, of course you did. That silly dowager What's-her-name was quite shocked at me, just because we had the looking-glass figure in the cotillion. It's the prettiest of the lot, I think. Old Major Ewart gave me a pair of ivory castanets with silver mountings last night, the sweetest things in the world. I really think he is seriously gone on me, and he must be sixty if he's an hour. I think I shall appeal to Chesterford for protection. What fun it would be to make Chesterford talk to him gravely like a grandson. He stopped at home this

morning to look after the baby. I think I shall get jealous of the nurse, and pretend that he's sweet on her, and that's why he goes to the nursery so much.'

Jack laughed.

'Between you, you hit the right average pretty well,' he said. 'If it wasn't for Chesterford, the baby would certainly have fallen downstairs half a dozen times. You don't half realise how important he is.'

'Oh, you're entirely wrong, Jack,' said Dodo calmly. 'It's just that which I do recognise; what I don't recognise is that I should be supposed to find ineffable joys in watching it eat and sleep and howl. You know one baby is very much like another.'

'In other words, supposing the boy had no expectations,' said Jack, 'and was not the heir-apparent of half Staffordshire, you would find him much less interesting.'

'Would you think me very heartless if I said "Yes"?' asked Dodo.

'Well, I never held a very high opinion of your heart, you know,' said Jack, laughing, 'and

I don't know that I think much worse of it now.'

'You judge so stupidly,' said Dodo; 'you elevate matrimony into a sacrament. Now I don't. It is a contract for mutual advantage. The husband gives wealth, position and all that, and the wife gives him a housekeeper, and heirs to his property. Don't frown, Jack. That's my eminently common-sense view of the question. It answers excellently, as I find by experience. But, of course, there are marriages for love. I suppose most of the lower middle-class marry for love, at least they haven't got any position or wealth to marry for. But we, the disillusioned and unromantic upper classes, see beyond that. I daresay our great grandfathers married for love, but the fact that so many of us don't, shows that ours is the more advanced, and probably correct view. You know all wine-tasters agree on the superiority of one wine, and the inferiority of another. That's the result of education. The amateur thinks they are all more or less alike, and very probably prefers some sweet bad kind. That's the middle-class view of love-marriages. The more I think of it,

the more I feel that love is an illusion. Think of all the people who marry for love, and get eternally tired of each other afterwards. They can't keep it up. The lovers grow into friends, and the friends into enemies. Those are the enviable ones who remain friends; but it is better to marry as a friend than as a lover, because in the latter case there is a reaction and a disappointment, which may perhaps ruin the friendship. Aren't I a wise woman, Jack? I think I shall set up a general advice office.'

Jack was rather pale, and his fingers twitched nervously at his reins.

'Have you never felt that illusion?' he asked, in a low voice.

'Really, Jack,' said Dodo, 'you behave as if you were the inquisition. But I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. For Chesterford I never have. He is the most excellent husband, and I esteem and admire him immensely. Don't make your horse so fidgety, Jack. As I was saying, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you, considering you proposed to me once, and confessed to the same illusion yourself. Have you got over it, by the

way? If I had married you, you certainly would have by this time.'

There was a long pause. Then Jack said,—

'No, Dodo, I have never got over it.'

The moment after he had said it, he would have given his right hand to have it unsaid. Dodo was silent for a moment, and Jack found himself noticing the tiny, trivial things about him. He observed a fly trying to alight on his horse's ear, but the animal always flicked it off with a little jerk, before it got fairly settled. He wondered whether the fly had illusions about that ear, and whether it imagined that it would be happy for ever and ever, if it could once settle there.

'You know we are saying the most frightfully unconventional things to each other,' said Dodo. 'I am very sorry for you, Jack, and I will administer consolation. When I said "No" to you, I did it with real regret, with quite a different sort of feeling to that which I should have had, if I had said "No" to Chesterford. It was quite an unreasonable feeling, I couldn't define it, but I think it must have been because—'

Then Jack recovered his self-respect in a

moment, by one of those strange contradictions in our nature, which urged him to stop his ears to what, a week before, he had been almost tempting her to say.

'Ah, stop, stop,' he said, 'you don't know what you are saying. Dodo, this won't do. Think of Chesterford.'

'Chesterford and the baby,' said Dodo softly. 'I believe you are right, Jack. This is unprofitable. But, Jack, since we renounce that, let us still be friends. Don't let this have made any difference to us. Try and realise that it is all an illusion.'

Dodo half turned towards him, with a long glance of her brown eyes, and a little smile playing about her mouth.

'Yes, yes,' said Jack, laughing nervously. 'I told Bertie so the other day. I have been a madman for half an hour, but that is over. Shall we turn?'

They wheeled their horses round, and cantered down the Row.

'Oh, this beautiful world!' exclaimed Dodo. 'You've no idea what it is to me to come out

of the house again, and ride and dance and sing. I really believe, Jack, that I enjoy things more than anyone else I know. Everything that enjoys itself appeals to me. Jack, do enjoy yourself, although we settled you mustn't appeal to me. Who is that girl standing there with the poodle? I think I shall get Chesterford to buy me a poodle. There's a woman next her awfully like Vivy, do you see, shading her eyes with her hand. It is Vivy.'

Dodo's face suddenly grew grave and frightened. She reined her horse in opposite to where Mrs Vivian was standing.

'Quick, quick,' she said, 'tell me what has happened!'

Mrs Vivian looked up at Dodo with infinite compassion in her eyes.

'Dodo, darling,' she said, 'give your horse to the groom. Please help her to dismount, Mr Broxton.'

Dodo got off, and Mrs Vivian led her to a seat. Dodo had a sudden flash of remembrance of how she had sat here with Jack a year ago.

'Tell me quickly,' she said again.

'My poor Dodo,' said Mrs Vivian, softly stroking the back of Dodo's hand. 'You will be brave, won't you? It is worth while being brave. It is all over. The baby died this morning, half an hour after you had gone.'

Dodo's first feeling was one of passionate anger and resentment. She felt she had been duped and tricked in a most unjustifiable manner. Fate had led her to expect some happy days, and she had been cruelly disappointed. It was not fair; she had just been released from two tedious months of inactivity, only to be caught again. It was like a cat playing with a mouse. She wanted to revenge herself on something.

'Oh, it is too awful,' she said. 'Vivy, what can I do? It is cruel.' Then her better nature came to her aid. 'Poor Chesterford, poor dear old boy,' she said simply.

Mrs Vivian's face grew more tender.

'I am glad you thought of him,' she said. 'His first thought was for you. He was there all the time. As soon as it was over he said to himself, "Please, God, help Dodo to bear it." You

bear it very well, dear. Come, the carriage is waiting.'

'Oh, I can't, I can't,' said Dodo passionately; 'let me sit here a little while, and then go away somewhere else. I can bear it better alone. I can't see Chesterford.'

'No, Dodo,' she said, 'you must not be cowardly. I know it is the worst part of it for you. But your duty lies with him. You must comfort him. You must make him feel that he has got you left. He is terribly broken, but he will be brave for your sake. Be brave for his.'

Dodo sighed wearily.

'I suppose you are right,' she said; 'I will come.'

She turned and looked round on to the gay scene. The Row was full of riders, and bright with the flooding sunlight.

'Oh, it is cruel,' she said. 'I only wanted to be happy, and I mayn't even be that. What is the good of it all, if I mayn't enjoy it? Why was the baby ever born? I wish it never had been. What good does it do anyone that I should suffer?'

Mrs Vivian felt horribly helpless and baffled.

How could she appeal to this woman, who looked at everything from only her own standpoint?

'Come, Dodo,' she said.

They drove back in silence. Chesterford was standing in the hall as they entered, waiting for them. He came forward to meet Dodo.

'My poor, poor darling,' he said, 'it is very hard on you. But we can bear it together, Dodo.'

Dodo turned from him passionately, and left him standing there.

. . . . . .

Dodo was sitting in the window of her morning-room late on the same afternoon. She and Lord Chesterford had been together to look at the baby as it lay there, with the little features that had been racked and distorted with pain, calm and set again, as if it only slept; and Dodo had at that moment one real pang of grief. Her first impulse, as we have seen, was one of anger and impatience at the stupidity of destiny. She had been enjoying herself, in a purely animal way so intensely, at that moment when she saw Mrs Vivian waiting for her under the trees. She was just released from a tedious period of inactivity,

and inactivity was to Dodo worse than anything in the Inferno.

'I daresay I should get accustomed to being roasted,' she had said once to Miss Grantham. 'It really would be rather interesting seeing your fingers curling up like fried bacon, but imagine being put in a nicely-furnished room with nobody to talk to, and a view over Hyde Park one side, and Melton Mowbray the other, and never being able to get out! The longer that lasted, the worse it would become.' And so she had felt the sort of rapture with which 'the prisoner leaps to loose his chains' when she had gone out that morning, and again knew the infinite delight of feeling a fine horse answer to her hand, under a sort of playful protest. Then this had come upon her, and Dodo felt that language failed her to express her profound contempt and dislike for the destiny that shapes our ends.

But her generosity and sense of fair play had come to her aid. She was not alone in this matter, and she quite realised that it was worse for Chesterford than herself.

Chesterford had evinced the most intense interest

in the baby in itself. Dodo, on the other hand, had frankly declared that the baby's potentialities possessed a far greater attraction for her than its actualities. But she had voluntarily linked her life with his, and she must do her part—they had had a great loss, and he must not feel that he bore it alone. Dodo shook her head hopelessly over the unknown factor, that made her so much to him, and left him so little to her, but she accepted it as inevitable. Almost immediately after she had left him in the hall, she felt angry with herself for having done so, just as she had been vexed at her reception of his proposal of family prayers, and a few minutes afterwards she sent for him, and they had gone together to see the baby. And then, because she was a woman, because she was human, because she was genuinely sorry for this honest, true man who knelt beside her and sobbed as if his heart was broken, but with a natural instinct turned to her, and sorrowed more for her than for himself, her intense self-centredness for the time vanished, and with a true and womanly instinct, she found her consolation in consoling him.

Dodo felt as if she had lived years since this morning, and longed to cut the next week out of her life, to lose it altogether. She wanted to get away out of the whole course of events, to begin again without any past. From a purely worldly point of view she was intensely vexed at the baby's death; she had felt an immense pride in having provided an heir, and it was all no use, it was over, it might as well never have been born. And, as the day wore on, she felt an overwhelming disgust of all the days that were to follow, the darkened house, the quieted movements, the enforced idleness. If only no one knew, Dodo felt that she would fling herself at once, this very minute, into the outside world again. What was the use of all this retirement? It only made a bad job worse. Surely, when misfortune comes on one, it is best to forget it as soon as possible, and Dodo's eminently practical way of forgetting anything, was to absorb herself in something else. 'What a sensible man David was,' she thought. 'He went and oiled himself, which, I suppose, is the equivalent of putting on one's very best evening dress.' She felt an inward laughter, more than half hysterical, as to

what would happen if she went and oiled Chesterford.

She got up and went languidly across to the window. Lord Chesterford's room was on the story below, and was built on a wing by itself, and a window looked out on her side of the house. Looking down she saw him kneeling at his table, with his face buried in his hands. Dodo was conscious of a lump rising in her throat, and she went back to her chair, and sat down again.

'He is such a good, honest, old boy,' she thought, 'and somehow, in a dim-lit way, he finds consolation in that. It is a merciful arrangement.'

She walked downstairs to his study, and went in. He had heard her step, and stood near the door waiting to receive her. Dodo felt infinitely sorry for him. Chesterford drew her into a chair, and knelt down beside her.

'You've no idea what a help you have been to me, darling,' he said. 'It makes me feel as if I was an awful coward, when I see you so brave.'

Dodo stroked his hand.

'Yes, yes,' she said, 'we must both be brave, we must help one another.'

'Ah, my own wife,' he said, 'what should I have done if it had been you? and I was dreadfully afraid at one time! You know you are both the baby and yourself to me now, and yet I thought before you were all you could be.'

Dodo felt horribly uncomfortable. She had been aware before that there had been moments when, as Jack expressed it, she was 'keeping it up,' but never to this extent.'

'Tell me about it, Chesterford,' she said.

'It was only half an hour after you went,' he said, 'that he suddenly got worse. The doctor came a few minutes after that. It was all practically over by then. It was convulsions, you know. He was quite quiet, and seemed out of pain for a few minutes before the end, and he opened his eyes, and put out his little arms towards me. Do you think he knew me, Dodo?'

'Yes, dear, yes,' said Dodo softly.

'I should be so happy to think he did,' said Lord Chesterford. 'Poor little chap, he always took to me from the first, do you remember? I

hope he knew me then. Mrs Vivian came very soon after, and she offered to go for you, and met you in the Park, didn't she?'

'Yes,' said Dodo; 'Jack and I were together. She is very good to us. Would you like to see her to-night?'

'Ah no, Dodo,' he said, 'I can't see anyone but your dear self. But make her come and see you if you feel inclined, only come and talk to me again afterwards.'

'No, dear,' said Dodo 'I won't have her, if you feel against it.'

'Then we shall have an evening together again, Dodo,' he said. 'I seem to have seen you so little, since you began to go about again,' he added wistfully.

'Oh, it must be so, said Dodo; you have one thing to do, and I have another. I've seen so many different people this last week, that I feel as if I had seen no one person.'

'You are so active,' he said, 'you do half a dozen things while I am doing one.'

'Oh, but you do great important man things,' said Dodo, 'and I do silly little woman things.'

She felt the conversation was becoming much more bearable.

Chesterford smiled. Dodo seized on it as a favourable omen.

'I like seeing you smile, old boy,' she said; 'you look more yourself than you did two hours ago.'

He looked at her earnestly.

'Dodo, you will not think me preaching or being priggish, will you, darling? You know me too well for that. There is one way of turning this into a blessing. We must try and see why this was sent us, and if we cannot see why, we must take it in faith, and go on living our lives simply and straightforwardly, and then, perhaps, we shall know sometime. Ah, my darling, it has taught me one thing already, for I never knew before how much I loved you. I loved you all I could before this, but it has somehow given me fresh power to love. I think the love I had for the boy has been added to the love I had for you, and it is yours, darling, all of it, always.'

CHAPTER X.

THAT same evening Edith Staines and Miss Grantham were seated together in a box at the opera. The first act was just over, and Edith, who had mercilessly silenced every remark Miss Grantham had made during it, relaxed a little. Miss Grantham's method of looking at an opera was to sit with her back to the stage, so as to command a better view of the house, and talk continuously. But Edith would not stand that. She had before her a large quarto containing the full score, and she had a pencil in her hand with which she entered little corrections, and now and then she made comments to herself.

'I shall tell Mancinelli of that,' she murmured. 'The whole point of the motif is that rapid run with the minim at the end, and he actually allowed that beast to make a rallentando.'

But the act was over now, and she shut the book with a bang.

'Come outside, Grantie,' she said, 'it's so fearfully hot. I had to hurry over dinner in order to get here in time. The overture is one of the best parts. It isn't like so many overtures that give you a sort of abstract of the opera, but it hints at it all, and leaves you to think it out.'

'Oh, I didn't hear the overture,' said Miss Grantham. 'I only got here at Mephistopheles' appearance. I think Edouard is such a dear. He really looks a very attractive devil. I suppose it's not exactly the beauty of holiness, but extremes meet, you know.'

'I must open the door,' said Edith. 'I want to sit in a draught.'

'There's Mr Broxton,' remarked Miss Grantham. 'I think he sees us. I hope he'll come up. I think it's simply charming, to see how devoted he still is to Dodo. I think he is what they call faithful.'

'I think it's scandalous,' said Edith hotly. 'He's got no business to hang about like that. It's very weak of him—I despise weak people. It's no use

being anything, unless you're strong as well, it's as bad as being second-rate. You may be of good quality, but if you're watered down, it's as bad as being inferior.'

Jack meantime had made his way up to the box.

'We've just been saying all sorts of nice things about you,' remarked Miss Grantham sweetly. 'Have you seen Dodo to-day?'

'Haven't you heard?' asked Jack.

Edith frowned.

'No; what?' she asked.

'Their baby died this morning,' he said.

Edith's score fell to the ground with a crash.

'Good heavens! is it true?' she asked. 'Who told you?'

'I was riding with Dodo this morning,' said he, 'and Mrs Vivian met Dodo and told her. I knew something had happened, so I went to inquire. No one has seen either of them again.'

'Did you try and see her?' said Edith severely.

'Yes, I went this evening.'

'Ah!' Edith frowned again. 'How does he take it?' she asked.

'I don't know,' he said; 'no one has seen them since.'

Edith picked up her score.

'Good-night, Grantie,' she said. 'Good-night, Mr Broxton. I must go.'

Miss Grantham looked up in astonishment. Edith was folding her opera cloak round her. Jack offered to help her.

'Thanks, I can do it,' she said brusquely.

'What are you going for?' asked Miss Grantham, in surprise.

'It's all right,' said Edith. 'I've got to see someone. I shall come back, probably.'

The door closed behind her.

'Of course it's awfully sad,' remarked Miss Grantham, 'but I don't see why Edith should go like that. I wonder where she's gone. Don't you adore the opera, Mr Broxton? I think it's simply lovely. It's so awfully sad about Marguerite, isn't it? I wish life was really like this. It would be so nice to sing a song whenever anything important happened. It would smooth things so. Oh, yes, this is the second act, isn't it? It's where Mephisto sings that song to the village

people. It always makes me feel creepy. Poor Dodo!'

'I am more sorry for him,' said Jack; 'you know he was simply wrapped up in the baby.'

'Dodo certainly finds consolation quickly,' said Miss Grantham. 'I think she's sensible. It really is no use crying over spilt milk. I suppose she won't go out again this season. Dear me, it's Lady Bretton's ball the week after next, in honour of Lucas's coming of age. Dodo was to have led the cotillion with Lord Ledgers. That was a good note. Isn't the scene charming?'

'I don't know what Dodo will do,' said Jack. 'I believe they will leave London, only—only—'

Miss Grantham looked at him inquiringly.

'You see Dodo has to be amused,' said Jack. 'I don't know what she would do, if she was to have to shut herself up again. She was frightfully bored after the baby's birth.'

Miss Grantham was casting a roving London eye over the occupants of the stalls.

'There's that little Mr Spencer, the clergyman at Kensington,' she said. 'I wonder how his conscience lets him come to see anything so immoral.

Isn't that Maud next him? Dear me, how interesting. Bring them up here after the act, Mr Broxton. I suppose Maud hasn't heard?'

'I think she's been with her father somewhere in Lancashire,' said Jack. 'She can only have come back to-day. There is Mrs Vane, too. Dodo can't have telegraphed to them.'

'Oh, that's so like Dodo,' murmured Miss Grantham; 'it probably never occurred to her. Dear me, this act is over. I am afraid we must have missed the "Virgo." What a pity. Do go, and ask them all to come up here.'

'So charmed,' murmured Mrs Vane, as she rustled into the box. 'Isn't it a lovely night? Dear Prince Waldenech met me in the hall, and he asked so affectionately after Dodo. Charming, wasn't it? Yes. And do you know Mr Spencer, dear Miss Grantham? Shall we tell Miss Grantham and Mr Broxton our little secret, Maud? Cupid has been busy here,' she whispered, with a rich elaborateness to Miss Grantham. 'Isn't it charming? We are delighted. Yes, Mr Spencer, Miss Grantham and Mr Broxton, of course—Mr Spencer.'

Mr Spencer bowed and smiled, and conducted himself as he should. He was a fashionable rector in a rich parish, who had long felt that the rich deserved as much looking after as the poor, and had been struck with Maud's zeal for the latter, and thought it would fit in very well with his zeal for the former, had won Maud's heart, and now appeared as the happy accepted lover.

Mrs Vane was anxious to behave in the way it was expected that she should, and, finding that Miss Grantham sat with her back to the stage and talked, took up a corresponding attitude herself. Miss Grantham quickly decided that she did not know about the death of Dodo's baby, and determined not to tell her. In the first place, it was to be supposed that she did not know either, and in the second, she was amused by the present company, and knew that to mention it was to break up the party.

Mr Spencer had a little copy of the words, with the English on one side, and the Italian on the other. When he came to a passage that he thought indelicate, he turned his attention to the

Italian. Maud sat between him and Miss Grantham.

'I am so delighted, Maud,' Miss Grantham was saying, 'and I am sure Dodo will be charmed. She doesn't know yet, I suppose? When is it to be?'

'Oh, I don't quite know,' said Maud confusedly. 'Algy, that is Mr Spencer, is going to leave London, you know, and take a living at Gloucester. I shall like that. There is a good deal of poverty at Gloucester.'

Miss Grantham smiled sympathetically.

'How sweet of you,' she said; 'and you will go and work among the poor, and give them soup and prayer-books, won't you? I should love to do that. Mrs Vivian will tell you all about those things, I suppose?'

'Oh, she took me to an awful slum before we left London,' said Maud, in a sort of rapture—'you know we have been away at Manchester for a week with my father—and I gave them some things I had worked. I am doing a pair of socks for Dodo's baby.'

Miss Grantham turned her attention to the stage.

'The Jewel song is perfectly lovely,' she remarked. 'I wish Edith was here. Don't you think that girl sings beautifully? I wonder who she is.'

At that moment the door of the box opened, and Edith entered. She grasped the situation at once, and felt furiously angry with Miss Grantham and Jack. She determined to put a stop to it.

'Dear Mrs Vane, you can't have heard. I only knew this evening, and I suppose Mrs Vivian's note has missed you somehow. I have just left her, and she told me she had written to you. You know Dodo's baby has been very ill, quite suddenly, and this morning—yes, yes—'

Mrs Vane started up distractedly.

'Oh, my poor Dodo,' she cried, 'I never knew! And here I am enjoying myself, when she—Maud, did you hear? Dodo's baby—only this morning. My poor Dodo!'

She began crying in a helpless sort of way.

Maud turned round with a face full of horror.

'How awful! Poor Dodo! Come, mother, we must go.'

Mr Spencer dropped his English and Italian version.

'Let me see you to your carriage,' he said. 'Let me give you an arm, Mrs Vane.'

Maud turned to Jack, and for once showed some of Dodo's spirit.

'Mr Broxton,' she said, 'I have an idea you knew. Perhaps I am wrong. If I am, I beg your pardon; if not, I consider you have behaved in a way I didn't expect of you, being a friend of Dodo's. I think—' she broke off, and followed the others. Jack felt horribly uncomfortable.

He and Edith and Miss Grantham stood in silence for a moment.

'It was horrible of you, Grantie,' said Edith, 'to let them sit here, and tell them nothing about it.'

'My dear Edith, I could do nothing else,' said Miss Grantham, in an even, calm voice. 'There would have been a scene, and I can't bear scenes. There has been a scene as it is, but you are responsible for that. You are rather jumpy to-night. Where have you been?'

'I have been to see Mrs Vivian,' said Edith

'I wanted to know about this. I told her I was coming back here, and she gave me this for you, Mr Broxton.'

She handed him a note. Then she picked up her big score, and sat down again with her pencil.

The note contained only two lines, requesting Mr Broxton to come and see her in the morning. Jack read it and tore it up. He felt undecided how to act. Edith was buried in her score, and gave no sign. Miss Grantham had resumed her place, and was gazing languidly at the box opposite. He picked up his hat, and turned to leave. Edith looked up from her score.

'I think I ought to tell you,' she said, 'that Mrs Vivian and I talked about you, and that note is the result. I don't care a pin what you think.'

Jack opened his eyes in astonishment. Edith had always struck him as being rather queer, and this statement seemed to him very queer indeed. Her manner was not conciliatory.

He bowed.

'I feel complimented by being the subject of

your conversation,' he replied with well-bred insolence, and closed the door behind him.

Miss Grantham laughed. A scene like this pleased her; it struck her as pure comedy.

'Really, Edith, you are very jumpy; I don't understand you a bit. You are unnecessarily rude. Why did you say you did not care a pin what he thought?'

'You won't understand, Grantie,' said Edith. 'Don't you see how dangerous it is all becoming? I don't care the least whether I am thought meddlesome. Jack Broxton is awfully in love with Dodo, anyone can see that, and Dodo evidently cares for him; and that poor, dear, honest fool Chesterford is completely blind to it all. It was bad enough before, but the baby's death makes it twice as bad. Dodo will want to be amused; she will hate this retirement, and she will expect Mr Broxton to amuse her. Don't you see she is awfully bored with her husband, and she will decline to be entirely confined to his company. While she could let off steam by dancing and riding and so on, it was safe; she only met Mr Broxton among fifty other people.

But decency, even Dodo's, will forbid her to meet those fifty other people now. And each time she sees him, she will return to her husband more wearied than before. It is all too horrible. I don't suppose she is in love with Jack Broxton, but she finds him attractive, and he knows it, and he is acting disgracefully in letting himself see her so much. Everyone knows he went abroad to avoid her—everyone except Dodo, that is, and she must guess. I respected him for that, but now he is playing the traitor to Chesterford. And Mrs Vivian quite agrees with me.'

'Oh, it's awfully interesting if you're right,' said Miss Grantham reflectively; 'but I think you exaggerate. Jack is not a cad. He doesn't mean any harm. Besides, he is a great friend of Chesterford's.'

'Well, he's got no business to play with fire,' said Edith. 'His sense of security only increases the real danger. If Chesterford knew exactly how matters stood it would be different, but he is so simple-hearted that he is only charmed to see Jack Broxton, and pleased that Dodo likes him.'

'Oh, it's awfully interesting,' murmured Miss Grantham.

'I could cry when I think of Chesterford,' said Edith. 'The whole thing is such a fearful tragedy. If only they can get over this time safely, it may all blow over. I wish Dodo could go out again to her balls and concerts. She finds such frantic interest in everything about her, that she doesn't think much of any particular person. But it is this period, when she is thrown entirely on two or three people, that is so dangerous. She really is a frightful problem. Chesterford was a bold or a blind man to marry her. Oh, I can't attend to this opera to-night. I shall go home. It's nearly over. Faust is singing hopelessly out of tune.'

She shut her book, and picked up her fan and gloves.

'Dear Edith,' said Miss Grantham languidly, 'I think you mean very well, but you are rather overdrawing things. Are you really going? I think I shall come too.'

Jack meantime was finding his way home in a rebellious and unchristian frame of mind. In the first place, he had just lost his temper, which

always seemed to him to be a most misdirected effort of energy; in the second place, he resented Edith's interference with all his heart and soul; and in the third, he did not feel so certain that she was wrong. Of course he guessed what Mrs Vivian's wish to see him meant, for it had occurred to him very vividly what consequences the death of the baby would have on him and Dodo: and he anticipated another period like that which had followed the birth. Jack could hardly dare to trust himself to think of that time. He knew it had been very pleasant to him, and that he had enjoyed Dodo's undisturbed company during many days in succession, but it was with a certain tingling of the ears that he thought of the events of the morning, and his mad confession to her. 'I have a genius for spoiling things,' thought Jack to himself. 'Everything was going right; I was seeing Dodo enough to keep me happy, and free from that hateful feeling of last autumn, and then I spoilt it all by a stupid remark that could do no good, nor help me in any conceivable way. How will Dodo have taken it?'

But he was quite sure of one thing—he would not go and see Mrs Vivian. He was, he felt, possessed of all the facts of the case, and he was competent to form a judgment on them—at any rate Mrs Vivian was not competent to do it for him. No, he would give it another chance. He would again reason out the pros and cons of the case, he would be quite honest, and he would act accordingly.

That he should arrive at the same conclusion was inevitable. The one thing in the world that no man can account for, or allow for, is change in himself. If Jack had been able to foresee, when he went abroad, that he would be acting thus with regard to Dodo, he would have thought himself mad, and it would have been as impossible for him to act thus then, as it was inevitable for him to act thus now. If we judge by our own standards, and our own standards alter, we cannot expect our verdicts to remain invariable. Under a strong attachment a man drifts, and he cannot at any one moment allow for, or feel the force of the current, for he is moving in it, though he thinks himself at rest. The horrible necessities of

cause and effect work in us, as well as around us. As Edith had said, his sense of security was his danger, for his standard of security was not the same as it had been.

He sat down and wrote a note to Mrs Vivian, saying that he regretted being unable to call on her to-morrow, and purposely forebore to give any reason. He had considerable faith in her power of reading between the lines, and the fact, baldly stated, was an unnecessary affront to her intellect.

Mrs Vivian read the note with very little surprise, but with a good deal of regret. She was genuinely sorry for him, but she had other means at her disposal, though they were not so pleasant to use. They involved a certain raking up of old dust-heaps, and a certain awakening of disagreeable memories. But it never occurred to her to draw back. Naturally enough she went to see Dodo next morning, and found her alone. Mrs Vivian had her lesson by heart, and she was only waiting for Dodo to tell her to begin, so to speak. Dodo hailed her with warmth; she had evidently found matters a little tedious.

'Dear Vivy,' she said, 'I'm so glad you've come; and Chesterford told me to ask you to see him, before you went away, in case you called. So you will, won't you? But I must have you for a long time first.'

'How is he?' asked Mrs Vivian.

'Oh, he's quite well,' said Dodo, 'but he feels it frightfully. But he is fortunate, he has spiritual consolation as his aid. I haven't, not one atom. It's a great nuisance, I know, but I don't see how to help it. Can the Ethiopian change his skin?'

'Ah, Dodo,' said she, with earnestness in her tone, 'you have a great opportunity—I don't think you realise how great.'

'Why, what do you mean?' said Dodo.

'Of course I know what you feel,' said Mrs Vivian, 'and it is necessary that with your grief there must be mixed up a great deal of vexation and annoyance. Isn't it so?'

'Yes, yes,' said Dodo. 'You don't despise me for feeling that?'

'Despise you!' said Mrs Vivian. 'You know me better than that. But you must not dwell on it.

There is something more important than the cancelling of your smaller engagements. You have a big engagement, you know, which must not be cancelled.'

Dodo rose from her chair with wide eyes.

'Ah, Vivy,' she said, 'you have guessed it, have you? It is quite true. Let me tell you all about it. It is just that which bothers me. These days when I only see Chesterford bore me more than I can say. I don't know why I tell you this; it isn't want of loyalty to him, but I want help. I don't know how to deal with him. Yes, he bores me. I always foresaw this, but I hoped I shouldn't mind. I was wrong and Jack was right. He warned me of it, but he must never know he was right. Of course you see why. I think I did not expect that Chesterford's love for me would last. I thought he would cease being my lover, and I am terribly wrong. It gets stronger and stronger. He told me so last night, and I felt a brute. But I comforted him and deceived him again. Ah, what could I do? I don't love him. I would give anything to do so. I think I felt once what love was, but only once, and not for him.'

Mrs Vivian looked up inquiringly.

'No, I sha'n't tell you about that,' said Dodo, speaking rapidly and excitedly; 'it would be a sort of desecration. There is something divine about Chesterford's feeling for me. I know it, but it doesn't really touch me. I am not capable of it, and what happens is that I continue to amuse myself on my own lines, and all that goes over my head. But I make him believe I understand. It makes him happy. And I know, I know, that when I am out of this, I shall go on just as usual, except that I shall feel like a prisoner escaped, and revel in my liberty. I know I shall. Sometimes I almost determine to make some sacrifice for him in a blind sort of way, like a heathen sacrificing to what he fears, yes, fears, but then that mood passes and I go on as usual. I long to get away from him. Sometimes I am afraid of hating him, if I see him too much or too exclusively.'

'Yes, Dodo, I know, I know,' said Mrs Vivian. 'I don't see how you are to learn it, unless it comes to you; but what you can do, is to act as if you felt it, not only in little tiny ways, like

calling him an "old darling," but in living for him more.'

'Ah, those are only words,' said Dodo impatiently. 'I realise it all, but I can't do it.'

There was a long silence. Then Mrs Vivian said,—

'Dodo, I am going to tell you what I have never told anyone before, and that is the story of my marriage. I know the current version very well, that I married a brute who neglected me. That he neglected me is true, but that is not all. Like you, I married without love, without even liking. There were reasons for it, which I need not trouble you with. I used to see a good deal of a man with whom I was in love, when I married Mr Vivian. He interested me and made my life more bearable. My husband grew jealous of him, almost directly after my marriage. I saw it, and, God forgive me, it amused me, and I let it go on—in fact, I encouraged it. That was my mistake, and I paid dearly for it. I believe he loved me at first; it was my fault that he did not continue to do so. Then my baby was born, and, a month

afterwards, somehow or other we quarrelled, and he said things to me which no woman ever forgets. He said it was not his child. I never forgot it, and it is a very short time ago since I forgave it. For two years after his death, as you know, I travelled abroad, and I fought against it, and I believe, before God, that I have forgiven him. Then I came back to London. But after that day when he said those things to me, we grew further and further apart. I interested myself in other things, in the poor, and so on, and he took to drinking. That killed him. He was run over in the street, as he came back from somewhere where he had been dining. But he was run over because he was dead drunk at the time. When I was abroad I came under the influence of a certain Roman Catholic priest. He did not convert me, nor did he try to, but he helped me very much; and one day, I remember the day very well, I was almost in despair, because I could not forgive the wrong my dead husband had done me, somehow a change began in me. I can tell you no more than that a change comes, and it is there. It is the grace of God.

There, Dodo, that is my history, and there is this you may learn from it, that you must be on your guard against making a mistake. You must never let Chesterford know how wide the gulf is between you. It will be a constant effort, I know, but it is all you can do. Set a watch on yourself ; let your indifference be your safeguard, your warning.'

Mrs Vivian stood up. Her eyes were full of tears, and she laid her hands on Dodo's shoulders. Dodo felt comfort in the presence of this strong woman, who had wrestled and conquered.

Dodo looked affectionately at her, and, with one of those pretty motions that came so naturally to her, she pressed her back into her chair, and knelt beside her.

'Dear Vivy,' she said, 'my little troubles have made you cry. I am so sorry, dear. You are very good to me. But I want to ask you one thing. About that man your husband was jealous of—'

'No, no,' said Mrs Vivian quickly; 'that was only one of the incidents which I had to tell you to make the story intelligible.'

Dodo hesitated.

'You are sure you aren't thinking of anyone in my case—of Jack, for instance?' she suddenly said.

Mrs Vivian did not answer for a moment. Then she said,—

'Dodo, I am going to be very frank with you. He is an instance—in a way. I don't mean to suppose for a moment that Chesterford is jealous of him, in fact, I know he can't be—it isn't in him; but he is a good instance of the sort of thing that makes you tend to neglect your husband.'

'But you don't think he is an instance in particular?' demanded Dodo. 'I don't mean to bind myself in any way, but I simply want to know.'

Mrs Vivian went straight to the point.

'That is a question which you can only decide for yourself,' she said. 'I cannot pretend to judge.'

Dodo smiled.

'Then I will decide for myself,' she said. 'You see, Jack is never dull. I daresay you may think him so, but I don't. He always manages to amuse me, and, on the whole, the more I am amused

the less bored I get in the intervals. He tides me over the difficult places. I allow they are difficult.'

'Ah, that is exactly what you mustn't allow,' said Mrs Vivian. 'You don't seem to realise any possible deficiency in yourself.'

'Oh, yes, I do,' said Dodo, as if she was announcing the most common-place fact in the world. 'I know I am deficient. I don't appreciate devotion, I don't appreciate the quality that makes one gaze and gaze, as it says in the hymn. It is rather frog-like that gazing; what do you call it—batrachian. Now, Maud is batrachian. I daresay it is a very high quality, but I don't quite live up to it. There are, of course, heaps of excellent things one doesn't live up to, like the accounts of the Stock Exchange in the *Times*. I fully understand that the steadiness of stockings makes a difference to somebody, only it doesn't make any difference to me.'

'Dodo, you are incorrigible,' said Mrs Vivian, laughing in spite of herself. 'I give you up—only, do the best you can. I believe, in the main, you agree with me. And now I must be off. You

said Lord Chesterford wished to see me. I suppose he is downstairs.'

'I think I shall come too,' said Dodo.

So they went down together. Lord Chesterford was in his study.

'Do you know what Mrs Vivian has been saying to me?' remarked Dodo placidly, as she laid her hand on his shoulder. 'She has been telling me I did not love you enough — isn't she ridiculous?'

Mrs Vivian for the moment was nonplussed, but she recovered herself quickly.

'Dodo is very naughty to-day,' she said. 'She misconstrues everything I say.'

'I don't think it's likely you said that,' said he, capturing Dodo's hand, 'because it isn't true.'

'I am certainly *de trop*,' murmured Mrs Vivian, turning to go.

Dodo's hand lay unresistingly in his.

'She has been so good and brave,' said Lord Chesterford to Mrs Vivian, 'she makes me feel ashamed.'

Mrs Vivian felt an immense admiration for him

'I said you deserved a very great deal,' she

said, putting out her hand to him. 'I must go, my carriage has been waiting an hour.'

He retained Dodo's hand, and they saw her to the door.

The footman met them in the hall.

'Mr Broxton wants to know whether you can see him, my lady,' he said to Dodo.

'Would you like to see Jack?' she asked Chesterford.

'I would rather you told him you can't,' he said.

'Of course I will,' she answered. She turned to the footman. 'Say I am engaged, but he may come again to-morrow and I will see him. You don't mind my seeing him, do you, Chesterford?'

'No, no, dear,' he said.

Dodo and Chesterford turned back to the drawing-room. Jack was on the steps.

'I thought you were engaged at this hour,' Mrs Vivian said to him.

'So I was,' he answered. 'Dodo asked me to come and see her.'

END OF VOL. I.

COLSTON AND COMPANY, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.